CHASING THE WAVE

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CHASING THE WAVE:

Overview of the Impact of Demographic, Economic and Social Trends on the Future of Youth in Atlantic Canada

Prepared for the Atlantic Regional Office, Population and Public Health Branch
Health Canada
by Joan M. Campbell

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INTRODUCTION

"THE HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IS A KEY ELEMENT FOR THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROGRESS OF ALL COUNTRIES..." (PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 1999)

As the new millennium begins, the makeup of Canada and other developed countries is changing dramatically. Populations are aging. With the massive "baby boom" generation approaching old age, the Canadian population as a whole is becoming older, i.e., senior age groups are forming a larger percentage of the whole population. At the same time as the numbers of seniors are on the rise, however, the birth rate is declining. So, over time, the Canadian population will have fewer and fewer children and youth, and proportionally, their share of the population will continue to shrink.

What are the implications of this shift for society and for youth? The purpose of this report is to examine information on the demographic, economic and social trends affecting youth and to speculate about the future. We know that the ratio of youth to seniors in the population will change dramatically over the next 30 years; the proportion of seniors in the Canadian population, including in Atlantic Canada, will double from 12% to 25%. The youth population — already a minority compared to their middle-aged parents and grandparents — will shrink even further. Therefore, we can only guess what impact this demographic shift will have on the lives of youth, their families and their communities.

The present report, commissioned by Health Canada, is meant to address what the future may look like for our youth given changes in the population's age structure, the economy and society. Although the effects of population aging will be far-reaching, this report looks specifically at impacts on youth (aged 13 to 24) in the Atlantic provinces. Another recent report from Health Canada, *Shifting Sands* (1999), explores issues of population aging from the perspective of seniors in Atlantic Canada.[1]

POPULATION HEALTH CONCEPTS FOR CONSIDERING IMPACTS ON YOUTH

The organizing framework for this look at trends affecting youth is based on the population health model. According to the model, health is a matter of much more than interactions with the health care system. That is, the population health approach is based on the idea that disparities in health and well-being are linked to social and economic inequities — far-reaching conditions that determine the health and well-being of entire populations. In this view, a broad set of collective and individual factors, such as income and social status, employment and working conditions, education, social support networks, biological factors, child development, and personal health practices[2] interact to influence health and disease processes directly and indirectly.

The population health model focuses not on disease endpoints, but on the "upstream" or root causes of disparities in health and well-being, where inequalities originate, e.g., poverty, social inequality, unemployment,

discrimination, and so on.[3] Eliminating social and economic inequities helps to build factors that protect against disease and promote health and well-being. These protective factors, which include resilience (the ability to cope with adversity), meaningful participation in society and social cohesion (mutual caring and a sense of being responsible for one another's well-being), enable individuals to develop their personal resources and capacities to make healthy choices throughout life.[4] The population health model also suggests tools for eliminating inequalities and maximizing population-wide benefits, including information, research and public policy.

Many of the issues facing youth in the future can be framed in relation to individual capacity and coping. In other words, what resources and supports will today's children and youth need in order to develop individual capacity and resilience to meet the challenges they will face in 10 to 20 years? The most critical issues facing youth in coming decades will revolve around broad determinants of health (income and social status, social and economic environment, education, physical environment, employment and working conditions). What potential changes in these factors are likely to influence the lives of young people for better or worse? How can society prepare our young people for the challenges they will face in the coming decades?

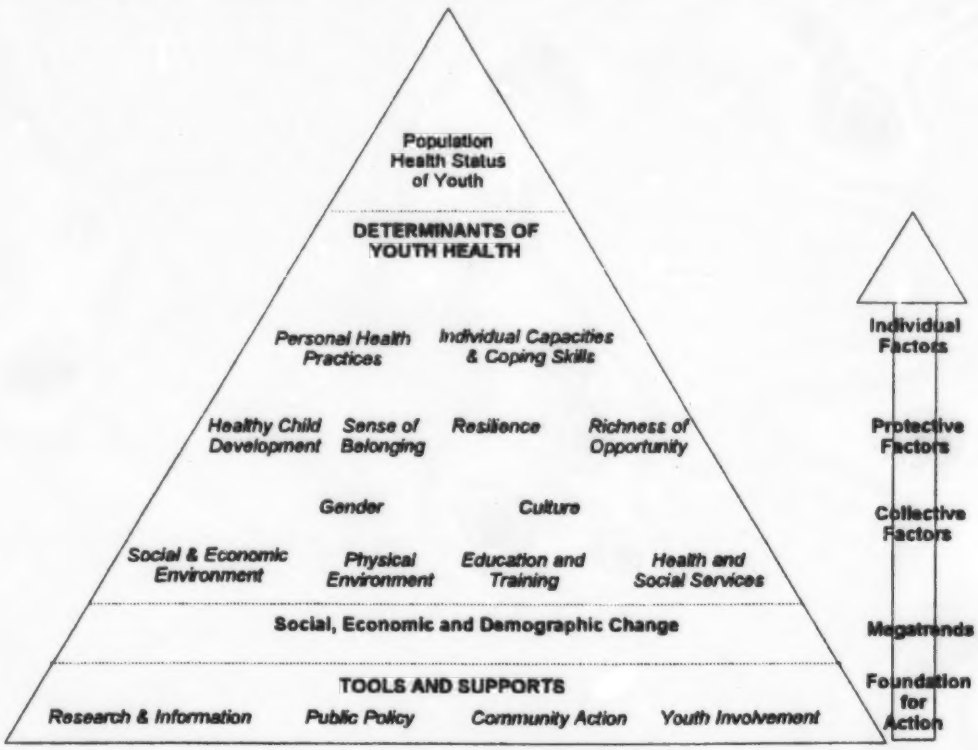


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework - The population health model presented in Figure 1 reflects the conceptual framework developed to address such questions, and the research presented in this report is organized around this framework. The model shows the unique protective factors that influence the youth population and emphasizes the influence of broad demographic, social and economic trends megatrends on population health. Starting at the bottom of the pyramid, factors at each level influence the elements above it.

Social status and income, environmental quality, and services to promote and enhance health are collective factors that contribute to the health and well-being of entire populations. Included in the social and economic environment are key determinants such as social support networks, education, employment and working conditions, and healthy child development. Gender and culture are other collective factors that play a role in determining health because widely held social values and norms define gender roles and cultural practices that influence outcomes for entire populations. When these collective factors interact, they create the conditions that contribute to good health or poor health and become important determinants of youth well-being.

Adequate family income, access to education and training, good jobs, safe neighbourhoods, clean air, supportive communities, youth-focused health promotion and counselling services, and respect for cultural identity are examples of collective factors that contribute to healthy adolescent development and transition to adulthood, and that influence youth within the key settings of families, schools, peer relationships and communities.

Important to the model are the protective factors — healthy child development, resilience, sense of belonging, and richness of opportunity. These factors (taken from recent work among adolescent and youth populations) describe the manner in which collective factors act on the health of individuals. Through direct and indirect influences on youth and in the key settings in their lives, the broad determinants of health shape these protective conditions that build personal resources and foster health and well-being.

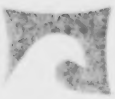
PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Healthy child development begins before birth and is the foundation for health and well-being throughout life. Individuals' prenatal, early childhood and pre-adolescent experiences can build personal resources such as coping skills and positive health practices to help protect them from risk conditions they will experience in youth and later life. On the other hand, early experiences can expose children to harm and reduce their chances for developing positive coping skills and health-promoting practices. This report highlights the important influences of childhood experience on youth development, although child development is not the focus of this work.

Resilience refers to individuals' ability to cope successfully in the face of adversity and to deal with setbacks created by risk conditions such as poverty, physical disabilities and family problems. Protective factors that foster resiliency in children and youth come from within themselves as individuals and from their families and environments.[5] [6]

Sense of belonging describes how youth feel about their families, peer relationships and schools. Recent research has shown that adolescents who feel strongly connected and relate positively to families and school are less likely to engage in risky behaviours and more likely to make positive choices that affect their health and well-being.[7]

Richness of opportunity is the idea that economic disparity cannot be captured by simple measures of poverty (e.g., Statistics Canada's low income cut-offs). For youth, inequity involves "poverty of opportunity," i.e., the absence



of things necessary to promote social inclusion and healthy development into adulthood.[8] Turning the concept around, richness of opportunity means providing whatever is necessary to eliminate inequity and ensure equal life chances for all youth, e.g., functioning families, quality education, positive role models, recreation opportunities, safe neighbourhoods, adequate shelter and clean air.

The proposed framework shows that these four protective factors influence and interact with youths' capacities and personal health practices, affecting choices and decisions they make about sexuality, schooling, peers and employment, among others.

In this model, demographic, social and economic trends are near the base of the pyramid to demonstrate that their influence underlies the action of key health determinants (collective factors), protective factors and individual factors. Although these trends do not allow us to predict the future, examining them allows us to speculate about what the most important influences on youth population health will be in the future.

The tools and supports at the base of the pyramid represent actions that can affect the future. Questions for further investigation and prescriptions for addressing possible outcomes that may emerge from this work are likely to be framed in terms of research and information, public policy, community action and involvement of youth in planning and decision-making.

Underlying the framework is the notion that over time, the fortunes of successive generations ebb and flow together with population. Tide, wind and currents shape and move successive waves to the Atlantic shore, much as changing population, economy and society influence the size, shape and experiences of each generation. As each wave washes against the shore, it leaves an impression on the sand. The baby boom generation is a large, powerful wave chased by smaller, gentler waves of younger generations. Each will make a unique impression. Nevertheless, as they reach the shore, they will make their own distinct "wave print" on the sand, covering the traces of all the earlier waves and shaping our shoreline in the timeless manner of generation upon generation.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report presents information on demographic, social and economic trends followed by a discussion of possible impacts of these changes on youth. Its focus is the Atlantic region as a whole; nevertheless, the report highlights issues specific to each province and instances in which certain provinces differ significantly from regional or national profiles or trends.

The first section of the report deals with demographic, social and economic megatrends as they will be experienced in the Atlantic provinces, especially by youth. Data describe relatively predictable changes — documented trends over the next 10 to 20 years including population projections, forecasts for the economy and expected social changes.

The second section of the report speculates about how the trends identified earlier are likely to affect youth in the Atlantic region. Little forward-looking information exists on most issues or projections for youth specifically. Political or social actions can influence the course of the megatrends and can alter these trends or their impacts. Thus, the discussion of prospects for youth is one view of the future. Readers should keep in mind that other scenarios are possible.

The final section of the report focuses on the broad implications for youth, and society as a whole, of the trends and their possible future impacts. In particular, it addresses the likely costs of not attending to these issues.

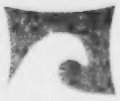
Throughout the report are quotations (IN CAPITAL LETTERS) from Atlantic Canadian youth (unless otherwise indicated). In each of the four provinces, young people were given the opportunity through focus groups to comment on their hopes, dreams and fears for the future. A total of 31 youth between 15 and 22 provided their views on the issues raised in this report, with roughly half from rural communities and half from urban areas in the Atlantic region. They were equally divided between men and women and represented a broad spectrum of social and economic circumstances.

The research and information in this report paint a broad picture for those interested in examining these issues further. The quality and availability of information determine the clarity of this picture and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. The information sources scanned for this work include national, provincial and regional agencies, organizations and databases. The report represents information and summarizes existing information, but is not exhaustive. Gathering information from a wide variety of sources may lend comprehensiveness, but it also limits comparability (e.g., among provinces, age groups and the like) and depth of analysis. Therefore, the conclusions in this report should be considered in light of the data and regarded not as facts but as issues for discussion and further in-depth examination.

MEGATRENDS AFFECTING THE LIVES OF YOUTH

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

Demography, the study of population shape and movement, includes the size of the population, the frequency of births and deaths (whether they are increasing or decreasing), the relative size of age groups, the sexes, the ethnic mix, places where people live, and the numbers of people arriving in and leaving a particular region. These features of populations are dynamic — they change over time. They have important impacts on all members of the population, determining for example, how and where government funds will be spent, where businesses, housing, schools and hospitals will be located, which industries are likely to thrive, and what are target markets for new products.



Trends in the population (i.e., changes over time) are useful indicators to anticipate the future, because population characteristics change slowly. So what we know now about the population allows us to make predictions about the foreseeable future. Such predictions are never hard and fast, however. Other kinds of changes, especially in government policies that affect populations — such as immigration — in behaviours of individuals and groups within the population and unforeseen circumstances like natural disasters and epidemics can affect the future of entire populations in significant and unpredictable ways.

Highlights of documented demographic changes that will affect the Canadian population and the Atlantic region over the next few decades are presented below.

The Population is Not Growing

- The Atlantic region's population is steadily declining.

- The birth rate (fertility) is too low to keep the population size stable.

- Immigration into the Atlantic region is far lower than into other parts of Canada.

- Atlantic Canada will experience negative population growth within 20 years. This is already happening in Newfoundland.

The population of the Atlantic provinces is in a slow, steady decline. The growth of the region's population has lagged for many years. The region's share of the national total has dropped over the past 35 years, due to the migration of Atlantic Canadians to other parts of Canada and the choices made by new immigrants to Canada to locate in other areas of the country with greater economic opportunities.[9] Since the 1950s, the Atlantic region's population has grown by 50 %. However, it has not kept pace with the country as a whole, which more than doubled in population during the same time despite decreasing fertility.

The Population is Aging: Boom, Bust and Echo

- Today's children and youth are part of a generation that is smaller than that of their parents and grandparents.

- The baby boom generation (those born between 1947 and 1964) is much larger than the age groups before or after it. (See Appendix 2.[10])

- By the mid-1960s the birth rate had dropped, resulting in a "baby bust." Between the 1960s and 1996, the number of Atlantic Canadians under 20 fell from nearly half to just over one-quarter.

• Baby boomers' children born between 1980 and 1995 are part of a mini baby boom — the "echo generation." The Atlantic region experienced very little "echo."

• In 1996, slightly more than one in ten Atlantic Canadians was over 65; by 2021, almost one in four will be a senior citizen.

• In 1996, roughly one in seven Atlantic Canadians was youth aged 15 to 24. By 2021, only one in ten will be youth.

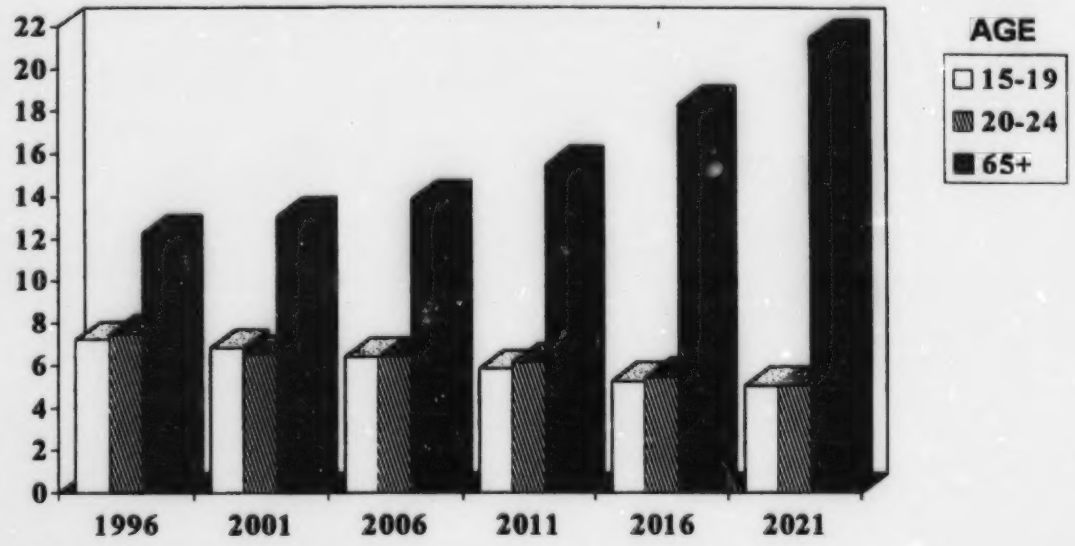


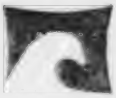
Figure 2 is another way of showing the relative proportions of youth and seniors in the Atlantic region population over the next 20 years. By 2021, youth aged 15 to 24 will make up just 10% of Atlantic Canadians and children will be another 6.6% - a decrease of 4.7% from 1996 levels. In contrast, the proportion of those 65 and over has been increasing for the last 35 years, and as the last of the huge baby boom generation become senior citizens, they will represent 21.4 % of the population in 2021.

Youth on the Move

• Children and youth today are more mobile than any previous generation. One-third have moved three or four times, while only one in four children has never moved.

• Migration out of province is more common in the Atlantic region than elsewhere in Canada.

• Between 1991 and 1996, nearly 30,000 Atlantic Canadians left the region. Most were from Newfoundland, and nearly one-third were youth aged 15 to 24 years. Most headed for Ontario or Alberta.



• Three-quarters of undergraduate students in the Atlantic region leave their home province to study elsewhere within the region, and one in five head to universities in other parts of Canada.

• Atlantic youth who lack education and training to make them competitive are more likely to remain in-province, although many migrate from rural areas to the cities.

• Well-educated, highly skilled Atlantic youth are more likely to leave the region because they can find entry-level jobs that pay better than those in the Atlantic job market.

" ALL OF THE GRADUATES FROM ACADIA WHERE I GO ARE GOING TO LEAVE THE PROVINCE TO FIND WORK BECAUSE THEY HAVE SO MUCH DEBT COMING OUT OF ACADIA THAT THEY NEED TO GO SOMEWHERE THEY WILL BE ABLE TO TRADE OFF... NOVA SCOTIA JUST DOESN'T HAVE THE HIGH-PAYING JOBS THAT SOME OTHER PLACES DO."

"YOU SEE, THAT... IS GOING TO BE PART OF THE PROBLEM: YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE NO ONE HERE IN THE WORK FORCE AND ALL THESE RETIREES TO SUPPORT. IT'S GOING TO MAKE IT VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE PROVINCE."

"WE WANT TO END UP HERE EVENTUALLY, BUT THERE'S NOTHING HERE FOR US RIGHT NOW."

Atlantic Canadians who have migrated elsewhere tend to return home when economic opportunities present themselves or, in the case of older adults, when they retire. It has been suggested that recent economic growth in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland due to offshore oil and gas development will act as a magnet drawing expatriate sons and daughters home. At this stage, however, it is still too soon to detect such a trend, although some evidence shows that expatriate Prince Edward Islanders are returning home to retire. Prince Edward Island is the only province in the region with positive net migration. [11]

The Aboriginal Youth Population is Exploding

• Across Canada, the numbers of Aboriginal children and youth are growing dramatically.

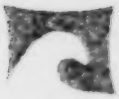
• More than half of the Aboriginal population is made up of children and youth.

• The Aboriginal population in the Atlantic provinces is relatively small compared to that in other parts of the country. Roughly one-twentieth of Canada's Aboriginal youth aged 15 to 24 live in the Atlantic provinces.

Rural Youth are Disappearing

• Approximately half the youth (15-24) in the Atlantic provinces live in rural areas.

• Economic decline in rural areas has led large numbers of rural youth to leave their communities for cities.



• Many younger youth (13-15) indicate they are biding their time until they are old enough to leave rural communities with no resources.

Economic change and chronic unemployment in rural areas over the past decade have contributed to rural population mobility. This process is accelerated in the Atlantic provinces. Cutbacks in services provided by governments (particularly in health, employment insurance and education) have resulted in fewer opportunities and resources for youth in rural communities. Consequently, many younger youth (13 - 15) who have not yet left their communities are simply waiting until they are old enough to follow their older brothers and sisters or neighbours to the city.

The loss of youth from our rural communities represents a lost generation of farmers. As such, rural youth migration may be the biggest threat facing our farm-based rural communities.

ECONOMIC CHANGES

The Economic Base Has Shifted

Major economic transformations are rapidly changing the nature of economic activity worldwide. A shift in the economic base from manufacturing and resource extraction to knowledge production and application have had major impacts on the Canadian economy, particularly in the Atlantic region. The Atlantic provinces historically had a resource and manufacturing economy: fishing, forestry and mining (and their associated industries) were the major economic engines for much of the twentieth century. A combination of factors, including the coming of the information age and resource depletion, have led to a decline in traditional resource and manufacturing industries in the Atlantic provinces. Currently, offshore oil and gas development is the major resource-based industry in the region. It is also driving the economies of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Over the past decade, the knowledge-based economy has emerged as an important source of new jobs and knowledge in the Atlantic region.[12] In 1996, the most knowledge-intensive industries in Atlantic Canada accounted for 14% of business sector output and 11% of the business sector employment base. This high knowledge sector is the fastest growing sector in the economy, responsible for an annual rate of employment growth of 4.8 %. Forecasts for the next decade indicate that employment growth in the region will continue to be dominated by this sector.[13]

"ALL THE JOBS NOW ARE AIMED TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY...YOU HAVE TO HAVE SOME KNOWLEDGE OF COMPUTERS, AND SURE, THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO SURVIVE AND DO MAKE A DECENT LIVING [WITHOUT COMPUTER KNOWLEDGE], BUT THEY ARE THE EXCEPTIONS."

On the other side of the ledger, the transition in the Atlantic economy in the 1980s, which is likely to continue, has resulted in an upheaval in the region's labour market. Loss of jobs and livelihoods has become a common occurrence for many Atlantic Canadians, especially for seasonal workers and those dependent on resource-related industries. The fishery and rural areas have been particularly hard hit, especially in Newfoundland as a result of the cod moratorium.

Unfortunately, those hardest hit by the adjustment to a knowledge-based economy are the ones least able to take advantage of the opportunities it creates. Displaced workers are mostly low skilled, often with limited education, literacy and numeracy, and usually living in rural communities. They have little access to the training and skills upgrading necessary to make them competitive in a labour market that is largely urban. Youth have even less chance as they are competing with displaced adult workers who are given priority for the limited available training opportunities. [14]

The shift to a knowledge-based economy requires a skilled and educated labour force. The new economy will continue to create opportunities for highly skilled professional, technical and managerial workers. Unfortunately, as knowledge-intensive jobs become more abundant, jobs for unskilled workers and youth will continue to decline. In an era when even traditionally low-skilled sectors are adopting computer-based technology, those who have not been trained/retrained to work with computers will become technological "have nots."

Economic Growth is Slow and Uncertain

Historically, the economy of the Atlantic region has lagged behind that of the rest of Canada in productivity and growth. For the past 35 years, economic growth has been declining for the country as a whole, as well as in the Atlantic provinces. Between 1981 and 1998, the average annual growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Atlantic Canada dropped from 3.9% to 1.4%. Labour markets, employment growth and productivity — the output per worker — also have been weak in the region, relative to the rest of the country.[15] Even growth in knowledge-intensive industries has been slow in the Atlantic provinces relative to that in Canada as a whole. Since the late 1980s, GDP growth in high knowledge sectors in the region has fallen behind the national average and is expected to remain weaker than that in the rest of Canada. [16]

The main engine of growth in the region currently is the offshore oil and gas industry. Investments in oil and gas exploration, extraction and (in the case of gas) distribution have been a strong stimulus for economic growth in the region, particularly in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, which have led the country in terms of economic growth over the past two or three years. Nevertheless, the positive growth outlook for the region is uncertain beyond the short term. Slower growth is possible, and in the long term, the Atlantic region's GDP is forecast to fall behind that of the rest of Canada over the next two decades.[17]

The Nature of Work Is Changing

Over the past two decades, where we work, who employs us and for how long, the basis on which we are paid, movement from one job to another and the benefits we can expect — all these aspects of work and the nature of jobs have changed. Regular, full-time jobs have decreased considerably, while part-time work, contract work, temporary employment, self-employment, and underemployment have become commonplace. Fewer Canadians are working standard, 35 to 40 hour weeks; instead, shorter and longer work weeks are becoming the norm. In general, those in low-paying jobs are working fewer hours, while those in well-paying occupations are working longer hours.[18] Those who work the longest hours are in the 25 to 54 age group, and they average 53 hours per week.[19] Persistently high unemployment, even in periods of economic growth, has fueled the spread of these non-standard forms of work.[20]

In the Atlantic provinces, the shrinking job supply has left few options for workers, especially younger workers. Accepting low-paying, part-time jobs with no benefits or job security is the cost of the lack of education and skills training.

For youth with a post-secondary education, fewer entry-level jobs in goods-producing industries, public administration, health and social services, or education are available. The major growth areas of employment for youth are in sales, service occupations, and managerial and professional occupations. Today's youth take longer to find their first stable job than youth in the past, and many are likely to find themselves in jobs for which they are overqualified. Also, more youth are working in part-time jobs than ever before: between 1976 and 1996, part-time employment among youth jumped from 21% to 46%.[21]

Aboriginal people are more likely than other Canadians to have part-time or temporary employment. In 1995, one-third of employed Aboriginal people worked in part-time jobs.[22]

Fewer Youth Employed than Ever Before

The long-term employment outlook is less rosy for youth than for adults. Employment trends in Canada are gradually improving after nearly a decade of persistent high unemployment. The current trend towards increasing employment rates is weaker in the Atlantic provinces than elsewhere, however, and exists largely as a result of economic activities surrounding offshore oil and gas development. The economic boom associated with this sector, including increased employment, is likely to taper off in the coming decade.

The "last hired - first fired" phenomenon applies to youth in a significant way. Even in times of high employment, youth are at the bottom of the labour market pecking order. Jobs that require minimal skills and less experience (a vanishing segment of the job market) are subject to competition from undereducated, unskilled adult workers, many of whom have been displaced as a result of economic restructuring. When unemployment rises, this tendency is more pronounced. It is not surprising, then, to discover that by 1996, youth employment in Canada had dropped

to 51.1 %, 11 percentage points below the 1989 level.[23] Youth unemployment in 1997 was the highest of any age group — 19.6 % in comparison with an overall unemployment rate of 9.2 %.[24]

Given the overall rate of unemployment in rural areas, youth living in rural communities throughout Atlantic Canada have very limited employment prospects. Nevertheless, according to recent estimates, urban youth are even less likely to find jobs: 70% of urban youth (aged 15 to 16) in a recent study had no work experience, compared to just 20% of peers in rural areas. At the same time, youth unemployment in the major cities in the region — St. John's (63%), Saint John (59%) and Halifax (55%) is well above the national average.[25]

Increasing youth unemployment is accompanied by decreasing participation of youth in the labour force.[26] From 1989 to 1996, youth labour force participation had dropped to 61.2 % from 70.6 %, reversing the previous trend for higher work force participation by youth compared to adults.[27] Much of the drop in youth labour force participation is due to higher full-time school attendance.

Between 1989 and 1996, the proportion of youth who had never held a job increased from 10% to 20 %. As time goes on then, the impact of these low rates of youth participation in the work force will result in an expanding pool of young people entering the full-time labour market with no work experience.[28]

Youth Employment Will Survive Population Aging

The major influences on the labour force over the next 10 to 20 years will be population size and age distribution. The size of the Canadian work force has been growing since the late 1960s, when the first baby boomers entered the job market. In 1995, nearly 19 million Canadians were in the labour force. This number is expected to rise gradually to almost 24 million by 2016. Currently making up nearly two-thirds (64%) of the total population, the working age population (16 - 65) will begin to decline in proportion to the population as a whole as baby boomers reach retirement age, starting around 2010.[29]

The labour force in the Atlantic region is historically smaller, by proportion, than in the rest of the country. For the past five to ten years, labour force growth has been slow across the region, especially in Newfoundland, where the labour force has actually been declining. By 2016, all four provinces will have shrinking work forces, unlike Canada as whole, which will have a relatively stable labour force due to immigration.[30]

Relatively high levels of youth migration from the Atlantic provinces, especially among youth with education and skills training, are an important factor in the decline of the region's work force.

The effects of population aging trends on labour force supply and demand will benefit youth over the long term. A current shortage of jobs for youth is the result of many middle-aged workers displaced as a result of economic restructuring and job loss, who are taking low-skilled and entry-level jobs traditionally available to youth.

However, this trend will reverse itself over the next 10 to 20 years: as workers of the baby boom generation retire, jobs for youth will become more plentiful.

Together, these trends will put pressure on the productive capacity of the shrinking labour force in the region over the next 20 years. The increasing social costs of an aging population, particularly those associated with health care and the Canada Pension Plan, will call for economic productivity at least on a par with current levels. Every worker will have to become more productive. The need to prevent declines in productivity and the growing demand for skilled workers as older workers retire are likely to create new opportunities in the region for all youth and young adults, particularly those who might otherwise leave the region. Pressure will be strong for employers to increase wages to levels comparable to those in other parts of Canada.

On the other hand, as the work force shrinks, society is likely to feel pressure to raise the retirement age to keep older, experienced workers productive. This tendency could create a bottleneck at the top of the job scale and make it difficult for older youth to gain experience in positions of responsibility or to move into managerial roles.

Economic Inequality Is Increasing

Over time, economic disparities in Canada have been growing. At a time when the economy is booming and economists are forecasting rapid growth in the Canadian economy, scarcity is growing in the midst of plenty. Between 1984 and 1994, families' income from earnings dropped by 30%. Recession, economic restructuring and cutbacks in government support have doubled the gap between rich and poor in that period: as the real employment earnings of those at the bottom end of the income spectrum drop, those in the highest income brackets continue to improve their earnings. Over the past 15 years, the incomes of the poorest 10% of Canadians declined 5%, while the incomes of the wealthiest 10% grew by 14%. In families with children, those at the top have 10.2 times the income of families at the bottom of the scale.[31]

Historically, transfer payments (e.g., employment insurance, children's benefits) to the poorest families helped offset income gaps. However, cutbacks in transfer payments in the 1990s have contributed to growing inequality. Between 1994 and 1996, average incomes, including transfers, of the poorest 10% of families dropped by 13%, while incomes of the wealthiest families rose by 2%. [32]

Other disparities exist as well. Younger workers have seen their incomes decline along with their employment opportunities, while the employment and income prospects for adults in middle age have steadily improved.[33] Also, the average earnings of Aboriginal people are 21 % less than those of Canadians as a whole.

More Children and Youth Are Living in Poverty

Families who are poor are raising children and youth in poverty. Low-income families spend more than 70% of after-tax income on essentials, so have little left to spend on things that enrich opportunities in children's lives, such

as recreation, reading materials, education, transportation and personal care products.[34] Family income is one of the most important influences on children's lives, according to the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth, and children and youth living in poverty are much more likely to experience poor living conditions and negative child development outcomes (e.g., impaired learning, behavioural problems) than other children.[35] [36]

Rates of child poverty in Canada have been increasing for nearly 20 years. It is estimated that in 1996, 1.5 million Canadian children — nearly one in five — were poor.[37] **Figure 3** shows that the incidence of child poverty in the Atlantic provinces and Canada declined in the 1980s but has been gradually climbing for the past decade. In 1996, more than one in five (21.2%) children and youth in the region lived in poverty, virtually the same proportion as in 1980.[38]

Within the region, Nova Scotia (23.5%) had the highest rate of child poverty and Prince Edward Island (18.5 %) the lowest in 1996, with New Brunswick (19.8%) and Newfoundland (20.2%) falling between, and slightly below, the national average (21.1 %). In certain locations, the rates are higher. In Saint John, for example, 36% of those aged 15 to 24 and 34% of those under 15 live in poverty. The Atlantic provinces have not all held the line on child poverty. Between 1980 and 1996, child poverty in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island increased by 7.6% and 4.2%, respectively. In contrast, in Newfoundland and New Brunswick, child poverty dropped by 8.7% and 0.6%, respectively, in that same period.[39]

Child poverty is greater among female lone-parent families than among two-parent families, and is higher in the Atlantic region than in the rest of Canada. **Figure 3** demonstrates that in 1996, more than two-thirds (67.6%) of Atlantic Canadian children in families led by single mothers lived below the poverty line (low income cut-offs), a jump of 10% from 1980. Contributing to the rise in poverty among single-parent families in the region was a decline in welfare benefits in three of the Atlantic provinces between 1986 and 1996 from -2.2% (Newfoundland) to -12.9% (Nova Scotia). Only New Brunswick raised welfare benefits to single-parent families (3.1%) during that time.[40]

Youth (under 25) also have experienced increasing poverty. Since 1980, the youth poverty rate has risen dramatically from 28% to 43% for young family heads, and from 47.8 % to 61% for single youth.[41] Most of these youth were children of poverty. As they become adults with their own families, they are likely to perpetuate the poverty cycle. Without major socio-political intervention, the growing numbers of poor children and youth today mean that over time, higher proportions of our youth and adult populations will be living in poverty than ever before.

"THE ISSUE OF POVERTY REALLY HIT HOME FOR ME BECAUSE I THINK THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD START DOING MORE FOR THE PEOPLE IN POVERTY, THEN THERE WILL BE MORE LIVES SAVED AND THEY WILL ACTUALLY HAVE OPPORTUNITIES..."

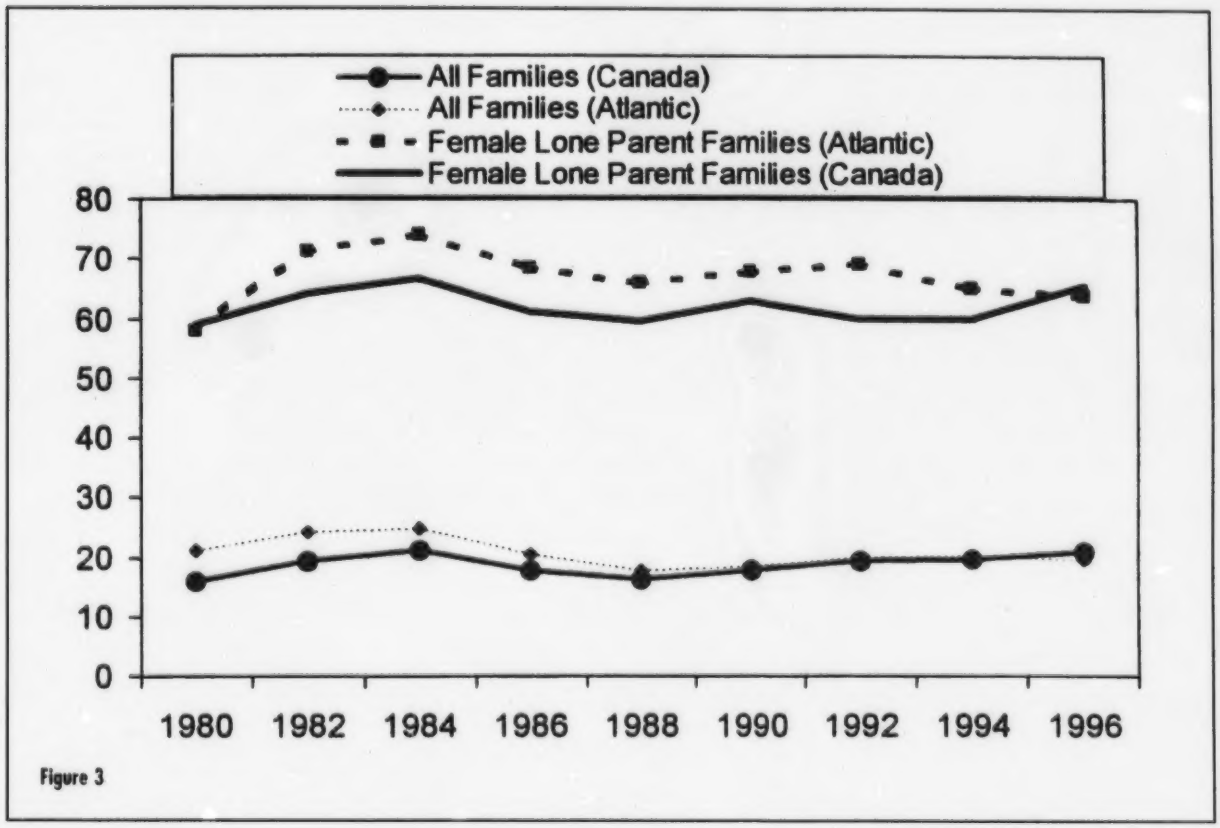


Figure 3

SOCIAL CHANGES

In addition to shifts in the population structure, sweeping changes are occurring in social institutions that are the building blocks of our society (e.g., family, school) and in processes that shape the most fundamental ways in which we deal with one another (e.g., technology). Social megatrends are collective factors that influence the entire population. The trends discussed in this section are particularly relevant to the lives of children and youth because of their impacts on the settings and conditions that determine healthy child development.

Families are Changing

The "typical" Canadian family of 25 years ago (married couple with children, a male breadwinner and stay-at-home mother) was no longer typical in 1999. Families are more diverse than ever before. In 1996, nine out of ten Canadians were living in families, but the proportion of married couples has been dropping (from 80% to 75% in the past decade), while common-law marriages are increasing rapidly. By 1996, 13% of all marriages were common-law (1.8 million), and half of these were families with children. The number of children in families increased by 6% in this period, most among common-law (52%) and single-parent (19%) families.[42]

Since 1980, the proportion of children who experience separation or divorce has tripled, rising to 16% of all children and youth.[43] Common-law unions are more likely to end in separation than are marriages. In 1995-1996, nearly 33% of children in common-law relationships had experienced the separation of their parents by the age of 10 in contrast to about 20% of children of married couples.[44]

Approximately one million families in Canada are led by one parent, usually a woman, and this number is projected to increase to 1.4 million by 2011.[45] In the Atlantic provinces, Newfoundland has the lowest proportion of single-parent families (13%), while Nova Scotia (16%) has the highest percentage in the region. New Brunswick (14%) and Prince Edward Island (14%) are both close to the national rate (15%). [46]

By 1995, 18.7% of all first marriages ended in divorce or separation. Between 1971 and 1982, the divorce rate in Canada doubled, but since the late 1980s, Canadians have been divorcing less. In contrast, single-parent families and "blended" (i.e., step) families are on the increase. In 1996, 21.6% of all families with children were lone-parent families and 8.1% were blended families.[47] In the Atlantic region, nearly one in every three children has experienced the separation of their parents by his/her tenth birthday.[48]

As well, mothers are spending more time working outside of the home. More than half of Canadian women with children under the age of 3 were in the paid work force in 1994, in comparison with just over one-third in 1981.[49] A recent study of work stress indicated that single mothers are the parents most likely to experience work stress, followed by working mothers in two-parent families and single fathers.[50]

Another significant trend in Canadian families is the growing tendency for young adult children to live at home, a consequence of the growing economic pressure on youth. In 1996, nearly half of young, unmarried Canadian men and one-third of young women aged 20 to 29 still lived at home.[51]

Youth who have grown up in an era when family arrangements are evolving are likely to be more flexible and less wedded to norms about what constitutes a family than their parents and grandparents. This suggests that the evolution of family arrangements is likely to continue as today's youth move into adulthood and start their own families.

Urban and Rural Communities are Changing

The character of Canadian communities is being transformed. Until recently, much of Canada was rural, with a character distinct from cities. Rural communities were organized around agriculture and resource economies and were generally homogeneous, stable and close-knit. Over the past 25 years, however, migration due to loss of resource and agriculture livelihoods has shrunk the rural population (especially among younger ages) and tax base. Some feel that the urban bias on the part of city-based planners and decision makers has contributed to the decline in rural livelihoods. In the Atlantic region, as in the rest of Canada, people are leaving rural areas, which are high in unemployment, and moving to cities in the region or out of province.[52]

A shrinking economic base, combined with both the out-migration of young people and with the centralization of important services (e.g., hospitals and schools), have resulted in many rural communities in Atlantic Canada becoming economically unstable. In-migration of middle-aged and retiring urban dwellers in search of a lifestyle change has not been enough to offset this trend.[53]

At the same time, advances in transportation, communication and technology have increased the similarity between rural and urban lifestyles and cultural experiences. Satellite dishes, highway development and computers have narrowed the rural/urban cultural divide. Population growth has made towns more like cities, and most cities have increased in size over the past decade. With the Internet, even the smallest outposts now can have access to most of the same information resources and many of the same services, and be influenced by the same mass media and cultural icons, as city dwellers.

Immigration is a key contributor to population growth in Canada and the changing face of communities, although less so in the Atlantic provinces. Immigrants — those born in countries other than Canada — make up 17.4% of the Canadian population but only 3.2% of the Atlantic region's population. Most immigrants today are members of visible minority groups. If current immigration patterns continue, by 2016, one in five Canadians is expected to be a member of a visible minority group.[54] In the Atlantic region, this trend is already noticeable in Halifax and Saint John, since most immigrants are drawn to cities.

Healthy communities have been characterized as being diverse, resilient and stable. The concept of healthy community encompasses self-reliance, social cohesion and the ability to withstand social, political and economic stresses over time.[55] Both rural and urban communities in the region have experienced stress in recent years and pressure to do more with less. Federal transfer payments to the provinces, which historically benefited municipalities, fell by $7 billion between 1996 and 1998.[56] Infrastructure, social services, recreation resources and public education systems all have suffered from cut-backs and the off-loading of responsibilities from senior levels of government to local governments. This trend threatens the long-term health and viability of many Atlantic Canadian communities, most of which find themselves in the double jeopardy position of experiencing declining local economies and diminishing transfers simultaneously.

Technology is Changing How We Communicate and Learn

The rapid pace of technological change is transforming nearly every aspect of our lives — health, education, work, recreation, communication — and has the potential for further transformation in the near future.

The personal computer is one of the most significant technological innovations of the 20th century. Computers permeate society — in the home, at work, at school, at play, and when traveling, shopping, and conducting business — and increasingly are becoming essential in the lives of most Canadians. In 1998, two in five (40.6%) Canadian households had a computer, up from one in ten in 1986. Not surprisingly, computer use lags behind in

rural communities, where only 23% of households have computers. Almost one-third (31.3%) of Atlantic Canadian households have computers.[57] [58]

Computer technology and Internet use are revolutionizing the way we communicate. More than one-third (34.2%) of Canadian households regularly use computers to communicate (10% for rural households). Households with a member under 18 are even more likely to use computers for communication (47.6%).

Computers are changing the way children and youth learn, especially in the higher grades, where students are encouraged to use computers for everything from finding and organizing information to developing presentations, discovering math concepts, researching geography, conducting scientific experiments and accessing desktop publishing. Schools in Canada are among the most advanced in the world in introducing computers into the classroom, and Atlantic Canadian schools lead the country in computer literacy. Half of students in the region use e-mail, 82.3% use information from external data bases and 36% design and maintain Web sites.[59] Educators believe that developing computer literacy in school-aged children will not only help prepare them for jobs in the knowledge economy — i.e., where the major share of economic activity is based on information and services — but that computer skills training in schools is a way of encouraging technological development in many communities.

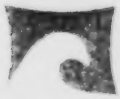
The Education System is Under Pressure

The future of education in Canada is directly tied to demographic and economic shifts. Education is a strong thread in the fabric of Canadians' lives. It is involved in developing good citizens, providing socialization and supervision, equalizing opportunities and providing skills for lifelong learning. Education also contributes to personal development and creates a productive economy. Historically, schools have been the centre of social and recreational activities in many Canadian communities.[60]

Population aging and economic change will exert pressures on public education. At a time when an educated, highly skilled work force is the key to economic prosperity, spending on education at all levels has fallen steadily over the past decade and will continue to decline as enrollments drop over the next 20 years. Canada has moved far behind the United States and European countries in terms of per capita spending on university students, which has dropped by 30% in Canada over the past 10 years. Since 1979, the federal share of spending on colleges and universities has dropped by more than 50%.[61] Unfortunately, it is likely that the perceived importance of spending on education will continue to decline as the youth population dwindles and spending priorities shift to meet the needs of the growing seniors population in the 21st century.[62]

"I DON'T THINK WE CAN TAKE ANY MORE MONEY OUT OF EDUCATION OR [WE] RISK THAT IT WILL FALL APART."

As the principal vehicle for socialization and supervision outside of the family, schools are being called on more and more to intervene in the lives of children and youth as families struggle to survive. Increasingly, schools are



expected to fill the gap in supervision and guidance created by time demands on working parents. Before-and-after school programs and lunchtime supervision are the norm today. Schools are also dealing with growing numbers of children and youth with behavioural problems linked to the stresses on families living in poverty or experiencing divorce or other life transitions. In many instances, resources simply do not exist in schools to address students' psychological and social problems adequately, yet the demand for attention and sensitivity to the critical needs of "at-risk" students has never been greater.[63]

Teachers are a major consideration in the future of education. Population aging, government cutbacks in education and teacher training, and early retirement trends among teachers of the baby boom generation are contributing to a looming shortage of teachers in public schools. The Canadian Teachers Federation predicts that within five years, Canada will be short 20,000 teachers. Over the past several years, budget reform has led to dwindling numbers of teachers, bigger classes, fewer resources for students with special needs, and greatly increased pressure on teachers in classrooms today.[64] Class size is beginning to drop in areas such as Halifax (except for suburban schools), but teachers report that the numbers of students do not accurately reflect the increasing burden of dealing with students with special needs, learning disabilities, physical disabilities and behavioural problems, while special resources and teaching assistants are lost through cutbacks.

"IMAGINE BEING IN A GRADE 6 CLASSROOM TEACHING WHEN EVERYBODY'S DOING 15 CHAPTER NOVELS AND YOU KNOW YOU HAVE ONE OR TWO KIDS WHO REALLY CAN'T READ AT ALL. IT'S REALLY HARD TO ENCOMPASS EVERYBODY'S EDUCATION."

Declining Enrollments are a Threat to Education

In the past, demographic shifts had significant effects on schools in Canada. Elementary and high school enrollments fluctuated widely as the boom, bust and echo generations made their way through the system. Changes in the school age population over time have led to cyclical changes in the education system. For example, the building of new schools in the 1950s and 60s and the emergence of portable classrooms have been succeeded by school closures and teacher layoffs in the 1990s; the growth and decline in teacher education and training have been accompanied by corresponding swings in the numbers of teachers.[65]

In the Atlantic provinces, because the baby boom echo has been largely absent (except to a slight extent in Prince Edward Island and in Halifax) and immigration has had a negligible impact on the population, school enrollments will drop steadily over the next two decades, reducing demand for classroom space and teachers. At the same time, the education sector will increasingly face competition for public funds from health care and other sectors that are intensively used by seniors. Faced with such a scenario, governments planning to build new schools would do well to reconsider whether this is the best use of public dollars spent on education. In an era when education will increasingly separate the "haves" from the "have-nots," the quality of programming, instructional resources, and the supply and preparation of teachers are the critical priorities.

Due to the movement of baby boomers, particularly women, into universities and colleges, enrollment in universities, community colleges and private training institutions has risen dramatically over the past 30 years. Predicting patterns of post-secondary education enrollments is complex, however. Because attendance at college and university after high school is not mandatory, no one-to-one relationship exists between youth population size and university enrollments. As well, the trend of adults returning to university over the past 15 years has leveled off, and future enrollments of "mature students" are difficult to predict. Beginning in the 1990s, young people have been staying in post-secondary institutions longer in response to a depressed job market for youth. As the work force ages and more jobs open up for youth, many youth likely will opt for jobs rather than extended classroom stays.

Education is More Important than Ever

At the same time, the need for quality education has never been greater. Globalization, growth of the post-industrial, knowledge economy and increasing labour market competition have fueled the demand for increasing levels of educational attainment. The labour force today is expected to have greater knowledge, skills and credentials than ever before. For example, Nova Scotia lost 30,300 jobs for workers without post-secondary education between 1991 and 1998, but 52,300 new jobs were created in that period for workers with post-secondary education.[66] As Canadians enter the new millennium, education has become the key to ensuring survival in an increasingly complex and uncertain world.[67]

"I THINK THAT WE'RE ALL GOING TO HAVE TO BECOME MORE PRODUCTIVE IF WE'RE GOING TO SUPPORT THE BOOM GENERATION IN THEIR OLD AGE, AND TO DO THAT, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO KNOW MORE. WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO HAVE... HIGHER EDUCATION THAN OUR PREDECESSORS OR THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME BEFORE US."

Youth who successfully navigate the school years and graduate from high school and then from college or university will have the best chance of getting ahead in the knowledge economy. For more than 30 years, rates of high school completion (and college and university graduations) have increased in Canada. More Canadians are attending and completing high school today than 20 years ago, although the high school drop-out rate has changed little over the past decade.[68] In 1996, three quarters (75.7%) of those aged 25 to 34 had completed high school in the four Atlantic provinces (compared with 81.1% nationally).[69] Nevertheless, Canada still lags behind the United States and other countries in high school graduates.

Public education in Canada is no longer the universal and equalizing institution it once was. Over time, education in Canada has become increasingly differentiated as new programs and institutions have emerged in response to demands for greater specialization. These new private institutions provide specialized skills training that is not accessible to lower-income youth. Increasing specialization at all levels, and the emergence of private-public sector partnerships to build new "high-tech" schools, tends to promote a two-tiered system of education, which gives

access to private education and/or cutting edge resources to a select few and erodes the role of public education as a primary source of equalization and social cohesion in our society.[70]

" I FIND THAT WITH THOSE NEW P3 SCHOOLS THAT ARE GOING IN, THOSE KIDS HAVE A TOTAL ADVANTAGE OVER THOSE KIDS IN AN OLDER HIGH SCHOOL."

"ONE OF THE PROBLEMS I SEE WITH HIGH SCHOOL IS THAT A LOT OF THE CURRICULUM IS GETTING WATERED DOWN...THE HIGH SCHOOL HERE, I KNOW, IS TRYING TO CUT BACK ON THE MORE ADVANCED COURSES. THEY'RE PUTTING ALL THE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO TAKE FRENCH IN THE SAME FRENCH CLASS. WHEN I WENT THROUGH ONLY A YEAR PRIOR, WE HAD ADVANCED LEVEL FRENCH AND CORE FRENCH."

In the face of such rapid changes, the public education system must be able to anticipate change and adapt quickly. Schools require flexibility to change with the rapidly changing needs of their students and communities. Unfortunately, the trend in centralization of education through amalgamation of school boards is likely to make it more difficult for schools to keep up with the fast pace of changes in society and technology.

SUMMARY OF THE MEGATRENDS

We do not have a crystal ball to tell us what the future will look like, but evidence from the recent past can point the way to likely futures. Key demographic, economic and social trends suggest that the future will present greater challenges to young people in the Atlantic provinces than recent generations of youth have encountered. Because of rapid population aging, out-migration of youth and a changing economy, pressure will grow for youth in the region to become better educated and more skilled, to remain in school longer, move around and be more productive to keep the economy thriving. Youth in the next century will have grown up with technological advances that have transformed communications, learning and economic activity. The growing technological sophistication of young people as they enter the job market will be a key factor in the region's economic growth.

IMPACTS OF THE MEGATRENDS ON YOUTH

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Many youth today are deeply worried about the future, their prospects for employment, their ability to earn a living, whether they will have to leave their communities and support systems to do so, and whether they can ever hope to achieve a comfortable lifestyle. Population aging and economic and social change will have important impacts on these and other aspects of the lives of youth. Megatrends will affect the broad conditions that determine the health and well-being of youth, such as education, employment, social status and income. At the same time, these trends will influence social supports and other factors that build personal resources and the ability to cope with change.

This section examines the impact of the megatrends on social support systems and youth work experience. In most cases, generalizations have been made based on national data (due to lack of available regional data), but wherever possible, the information has been filtered through an Atlantic region lens.

Family is Most Important

The family is the most critical setting for socialization, emotional and physical development and well-being in the lives of children and youth. For young people today, "the family" may mean more — or less — than mother, father and siblings. Changing structures and norms mean that for many youth, families consist of their most significant relationships, regardless of blood relations. Families may be made up of grandparents, step- and half-brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, neighbours, friends, friends' parents, one's own mother and/or father, or step-parents, and parents ' boyfriends/girlfriends.

"YOU KNOW, EVEN IF IT'S YOUR FRIENDS SAYING... 'I KNOW YOU CAN GET THROUGH THIS', IF YOU DON'T HAVE THAT FRIEND OR YOUR DAD OR YOUR MOM OR YOUR AUNT OR WHOEVER, YOU KNOW IT WOULD BE REALLY HARD... IT'S AWFUL FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE THAT."

Youth who have positive attachments to their families — a sense of belonging — are happier, feel better about themselves, do better in and feel better about school, have constructive peer relationships, are less likely to engage in risk behaviours and are more likely to continue their education past high school than youth who do not feel connected to family.[71] [72] [73] Canadian youth recently indicated that family is more important to them than food and shelter, health, culture or nationality. Family was voted the number one right in an election sponsored by UNICEF worldwide on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Canada, out of nearly 190,000 children and youth who voted across the country, almost one in four (24.2%) chose family as the most important of 10 rights.[74]

Ideally, the family is the key protective force against harm and risk, setting the stage for children and youth to develop resilience: the ability to cope despite the odds associated with life challenges such as uncertainty about the future and any number of other stresses. Families that produce resilient children are characterized by stability, cohesiveness, adaptability, collective coping skills, and strong support networks that include extended family, neighbours, co-workers and friends.[75]

Recent research shows that a large majority of Canadian youth in Grades 6, 8, and 10 — three-quarters of whom live with both biological parents — feel their parents trust and understand them, find it easy to talk with their parents and believe they are important to their parents. These perceptions are relatively unchanged since 1990. [76] Similar findings emerged from a recent study in British Columbia of nearly 26,000 12- to 18-year olds, 85% of whom revealed medium to high levels of family connectedness , i.e., a sense of belonging.

"MY FRIENDS WHO HAD A REALLY GOOD FAMILY, SOMEBODY WHO CARED HOW THEIR DAY AT SCHOOL WAS AND KNEW THAT THEY HAD AN EXAM NEXT WEEK ARE THE ONES THAT WERE DOING WELL AND SEEMED TO HAVE IT TOGETHER."

Children raised in stable, nurturing relationships are more likely to develop self-esteem, trust, optimism, positive coping skills, and other traits that protect them from problem behaviours.[77] Children who grow up in unstable, conflict-ridden relationships have less opportunity to develop trust and self-esteem. Instead, they may learn to be aggressive, mistrustful and defensive. They show problem behaviours early on — aggression, depression, anxiety, delinquency — and are more likely than their resilient peers to grow up engaging in risk behaviours.[78]

Positive, effective parenting is characterized by consistency, warmth, firmness, and a democratic approach to discipline. Some very preliminary data from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth point to the importance of positive parenting skills. It is fair to assume that many parents need to improve their capacity to use positive parenting practices because the effects of positive parenting can override many other disadvantages in children's lives, including low income or being raised by a lone parent. On the other hand, negative parenting styles (permissive, controlling, inconsistent) are associated with problem behaviours in children and youth regardless of income status.[79]

Risk factors, including social and economic disadvantages, chronic unemployment and low levels of parental education profoundly affect the way parents raise children. Marital conflict and separation, physical and psychological abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and frequent moves create conditions that diminish the resiliency of families. Families living in these conditions are rarely resilient.

Although family structures are becoming more diverse in Canada (more common-law and single-parent and blended families), the shape and nature of families may not be as important as the quality of relationships and the parenting styles practiced. If raising children to be resilient youth and adults is a goal for Canadian families, then more attention needs to be paid to parenting skills training. More importantly, conditions such as socioeconomic disadvantage, lack of education and unemployment must be addressed. Children and youth must be placed at the centre of social policy development to improve the chances for every child to become resilient.

Among those at greatest risk are children "in care," whose lives are defined by family instability, often from an early age. Nearly 50,000 Canadian children under 18 are in foster care, and according to the Youth in Care Network, a national advocacy group, these numbers are growing.[80] This trend is not surprising, given the erosion of social welfare benefits to disadvantaged families and the rise in child poverty over the past decade, but it raises concern about the future of these youth. Frequently, youth who are in permanent wardship (i.e., in the care of social service agencies) fall between the cracks. With older youth (16+) in particular, service agencies take limited accountability for their well-being, and beyond a certain age (which varies from province to province), they are on their own.

Over the past two decades, day care has become an important setting in the lives of children and has been the subject of much debate about whether children would be better off at home being looked after by a parent. Day care is not a substitute for the nurturing care of parents and was never intended to replace the role of family in the lives of pre-schoolers. Substandard day care can be harmful to children. Having said that, evidence is mounting that high-quality, regulated day care has beneficial effects on children that persist into youth and adulthood, including higher cognitive functioning, higher academic achievement and greater educational attainment.[81] Families may also be better off in terms of mothers' educational and employment achievements.[82] The likelihood that high-quality day care enhances social outcomes for children and their families has important implications for family policy and the well-being of youth in the future.

Over the next 20 years, families are likely to continue evolving. The impacts on youth of separation, divorce, or being raised in single-parent families or in common-law relationships will depend on parents' skills, the social supports available to families and youth themselves, and, importantly, the socioeconomic status of families.

Community is Where Opportunities Will be Found

Youth and their families live their lives in neighbourhoods and communities that provide housing, education, social and health services, employment, child care and opportunities for recreation. In the community, youth play, socialize with friends, work, volunteer, travel, pursue spirituality, and develop supportive relationships outside of family and school. Communities that are safe, stable, supportive and cohesive promote resiliency in children and youth. They are settings that create richness of opportunity for young people and their families. Healthy communities offer many possibilities for social inclusion and minimization of inequities; they do not stereotype youth but value them as individuals. Youth raised in healthy communities have opportunities to develop trust, autonomy and initiative through interactions with peers and adults.

In Canada, the growing divide between the rich and the poor is evident in communities as well as in individuals and families. Youth in the lowest income groups live in urban neighbourhoods where safety and shelter are frequent concerns.[83] Compounding the situation are cutbacks in social housing and municipal services such as policing, which amount to not-so-benign neglect of these neighbourhoods.

Cities in the Atlantic region are experiencing more economic growth than outlying areas, but reductions in federal transfers have trickled down to city neighbourhoods, even in the cities experiencing strong economic growth — Halifax and St. John's — depriving them of infrastructure and programs. Resources and opportunities for youth in these communities — especially low-income youth — are strained even further by the influx of rural youth into the cities. It is unlikely that tax revenue from economic growth in the region will be enough to restore lost resources and amenities to cities in the region over the short term. The situation is not likely to improve for youth in Atlantic cities unless new funds are found to revitalize these cities.

Most Canadian cities charge user fees for services and recreational facilities, limiting access in favour of those who can afford to pay and creating further impoverishment of opportunity for those who cannot.[84] Low-income families cannot afford recreation: they spend less than one-third on recreational activities spent by families who are well-off.[85] This explains why youth living in poverty rarely play team hockey or other team sports requiring cash outlays for such things as equipment or registration.

Rural communities, especially in the Atlantic provinces, have borne the brunt of increasing economic inequities. Loss of traditional livelihoods and migration of young people have not only eroded community resources for youth but have also strained the coping resources of rural residents. Nowhere is this more evident than in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.[86] While the character of rural communities is more cohesive and supportive than most inner city neighbourhoods, youth living in these communities experience similar impoverishment of opportunity. Recreational activities are few, as are appropriate settings for youth to gather after school. Boredom and isolation are significant problems for rural youth that seem likely to get worse before they get better, given the decline of many rural areas in the Atlantic region.

In many communities, negative perceptions of all youth are fed by media portrayals of crimes committed by a few individuals, despite the fact that youth crimes are vastly outnumbered by adult criminal activities. Stereotyping of youth as unruly, violent and untrustworthy is an obstacle to the inclusion of youth in community life, as well as being personally hurtful. These stereotypes foster misperceptions and do a disservice to youth by overlooking the positive qualities and actions of the majority of young people.

"YOUTH AND TEENS ARE A LITTLE WORSE OFF [THAN OUR PARENTS] BECAUSE WE'RE GETTING SUCH A BAD REPUTATION NOW, IN THE NEWS AND EVERYTHING AND... WHEN YOU WALK INTO A STORE THE STORE CLERK IS WATCHING YOU, THINKING YOU'RE GONNA STEAL SOMETHING. AND SOMETIMES, THEY KICK YOU OUT OF THE STORE AND EVEN IF YOU'RE JUST HANGING AROUND THE MALLS, YOU'RE JUST THERE. I MEAN, YOU'RE NOT HURTING ANYBODY AND THE SECURITY GUARD IS COMING TO KICK YOU OUT."

"ON THE NEWS, THE CRIMES BEING COMMITTED SUCH AS MURDERS, BREAK-INS, MUGGING, FIRES, ARE MOSTLY BEING DONE BY ADULTS... NOT THE TEENS; SO PEOPLE WHO ARE SCARED OF TEENS OR YOUTH SHOULDN'T BE BECAUSE MANY OF US ARE GOOD PEOPLE, AND IF WE MAKE MISTAKES, DON'T PUT US DOWN FOR IT, HELP US LEARN FROM THEM. WE ARE HUMANS AS WELL... WE'RE NOT PERFECT!"

Youth Who Have Friends Will Feel Good About Themselves

Youth report that their relationships with friends are the most important next to those with their families, and the vast majority of youth say they have someone they can confide in and get advice from.[87] Beginning in early adolescence, peer relationships become increasingly influential as young people begin to spend more time with

friends. Relating to peers is an important way for youth to develop social skills that form the basis for relationships later in life.

Peer relations in adolescence have a strong influence on self-esteem. Young people who have at least two close friends generally have greater self-esteem, get along better with parents, and enjoy school more than those who have fewer or no close friends. Youth who feel rejected by their peers are more likely to become depressed and withdrawn and are at greater risk of being bullied.[88]

Fitting in with and supporting one another are important to young people. Youth who feel rejected or neglected by peers often engage in risk behaviours in order to be accepted. Becoming a member of groups that set themselves apart by skipping school, smoking, using alcohol and drugs, and being involved in inappropriate or unsafe sexual activity often may be the only alternative for youth who do not have close friends. The prevalence of several of these activities, including alcohol and marijuana use, smoking and skipping school is on the rise among youth between grades 6 and 10. More often than not, the youth who belong to these groups do not get along with parents and feel little connection to school. They spend large amounts of time with peers and unsupervised by parents.[89] [90]

Over the next 10 to 20 years, growing economic disparity is likely to widen the gap between have and have-not youth. Young people who cannot afford to wear the trendiest clothes, buy the latest music or participate in after-school recreation activities will find it difficult to fit in. Low-income youth will be alienated from their peers in the mainstream in increasing numbers; it seems unlikely that these young people are going to give up risky activities in the foreseeable future despite health promotion efforts targeted at youth risk behaviours. (In fact, recent evidence with heart disease prevention suggests that the stress of surviving day to day is a major obstacle to the effectiveness of health prevention and promotion among low-income groups.[91])

Another trend that may have negative effects on peer relations among youth is the rapid spread of computer technology in schools and homes. Canadian youth spend increasing amounts of time playing computer games.[92] The growing availability of computers and access to the Internet at home have given youth who feel alienated from peers and family a substitute for belonging and face-to-face interaction with peers. The "cyber-society," which includes chat rooms; games played in real time with Internet partners; current popular music that can be downloaded, saved and played over again; Internet stores; and a vast repertoire of sexually explicit material, is a seductive world even for youth who have a sense of belonging. For youth on the margins who are unaccepted by their peers, lonely and/or unsupervised by parents, computers can be a negative socializing influence if used without any restrictions. The potential for unhealthy use of computers by young people, coupled with their increasing skill and sophistication in using them, make it important to address issues of regulation and supervision of youth computer use.

Work is a Worry for Youth

Youth today are seriously concerned about their future prospects for employment and secure livelihoods. In the Atlantic provinces, this deep concern translates into widespread migration of young people out of their home provinces, especially Newfoundland. The disappearance of jobs associated with the fishery, mining and associated industries, and the emphasis on re-training adults displaced from these industries have left few options for youth with limited education and skills. In the face of economic growth due to offshore oil and gas resources, the lack of appropriate training opportunities in specialized skills required by these industries is a major obstacle to youth taking advantage of the boom times.

Even the best and brightest may have little confidence about making their future in their home province. Cuts to higher education over the past two decades have made college and university education less and less accessible. Salaries paid in the region are well below those that university graduates can earn elsewhere in Canada or the United States, and those with less education can expect substantially lower earnings than their university graduate peers.

" I DO HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT SOMEWHERE THERE WILL BE SOMETHING FOR ME, THAT I WILL BE ABLE TO GET HIRED. BUT... IT'S LOOKING GRIM FOR NOVA SCOTIA PROSPECTS OR EVEN ATLANTIC CANADA."

Entry into the paid labour force is one of the most important changes marking the transition to adulthood and a growing challenge for youth. Yet in the Atlantic region, nearly two-thirds of 15-year-olds and one-third of those aged 17 to 19 had never had paid employment in 1996.[93] The disappearance of low-skilled jobs previously available to youth and the growth in knowledge-intensive jobs requiring specialized skills and training will keep youth at a disadvantage in the employment market for the foreseeable future.

Young people from low-income families are less likely to find employment than their middle- and upper-income peers. Not being able to work means that many youth do not have spending money and cannot afford either to participate in recreation and social activities with their peers or to have advanced education and training. Some feel they must resort to panhandling or petty crime to obtain spending money. The inability to find employment creates a vicious circle for these youth, whose transition to work becomes more difficult the longer they go without having any job experience.

For young people who do work, the first job is likely to be in a small establishment or family-run business. Youth of self-employed parents have the advantage of being able to work in the family business. Young women are most often employed in service and clerical/sales positions, while young men more often find work in blue collar and sales occupations.[94]

"I WORK FOUR PART-TIME JOBS WHILE I'M AT SCHOOL TRYING TO RAISE EXTRA MONEY TO PAY FOR MY BOOKS AND LIFE NECESSITIES AND MINIMAL SCHOLARSHIPS. I HAD A RELATIVELY GOOD BURSARY ENTRANCE SCHOLARSHIP, BUT AFTER MY FIRST YEAR, HAVING TO WORK SO MANY JOBS ON TOP OF BEING A STUDENT, I COULDN'T MAINTAIN THAT..."

Many of the youth who have jobs are juggling part-time employment with school. The proportion of youth who combine work and school is close to what it was 15 years ago (in 1997, nearly 60% of part-time students and about half as many full-time students had paid employment). The schoolwork of youth who combine jobs and school does not suffer unless time spent working exceeds 20 hours per week. Only 2% of those students aged 15 to 19 work more than 20 hours per week. Students who work fewer than 20 hours per week perform well in school and are less likely to drop out than those without jobs. Youth who work and go to school are also more physically active than peers who do not work. On the other hand, working while going to school can pave the way for certain negative behaviours like smoking and alcohol consumption.[95]

Despite the shortage of job opportunities for youth — or maybe because of it — young people are volunteering their time to charitable and non-profit organizations more than they were a decade ago. One-third of Canadian youth aged 15 to 24 volunteered their time in 1997, compared with 18% in 1987. The reasons youth volunteer have to do with their hopes for the future: to improve job opportunities, increase skills and explore their own abilities. Most youth who volunteer believe they are improving their chances for employment, which seems to be the case: 25% of youth polled in the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating indicated that their volunteer experience had helped them get a job.[96]

Being employed, gaining early work experience and balancing school and work have important benefits for youth. Unfortunately, growing numbers of youth are missing out because they cannot find jobs in an economy that seems to have diminishing opportunities for those with little or no experience or special skills. Youth living in poverty, whose numbers are growing, need jobs the most, yet they are the least likely to find employment. In coming decades, the plight of these young people will become more critical: in a society with fewer and fewer working-age contributors to the tax base that supports the entire population, young and old, "dependent" youth are likely to be unwelcome. Poor, unemployed youth may have little in the future in the way of a social safety net.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Apart from family, school (primary, secondary and post-secondary) is the most influential setting in the lives of most children and youth. Over a period of 12 or more years of primary, secondary and post-secondary schooling, children move through critical stages of child development, adolescence and young adulthood. They are equipped with skills and knowledge, and they are socialized and provided with personal resources that will enable them to make choices that shape their lives in the future. The experiences children and youth have in school — their achievements and struggles, their relationships with teachers and peers, affirmations of their self-worth — all contribute in important ways to who they will become.

This section examines issues of future school enrollments, educational attainment and literacy of youth in light of demographic, economic and social megatrends.

Advanced Education is Out of Reach

An important factor influencing post-secondary enrollments is the high cost of tuition, which is becoming a deterrent to university education, increasingly so as youth employment opportunities dwindle and students must rely on large student loans to attend university or college. Many students who make the choice to attend university assume a heavy debt load when they graduate. Between 1990 and 1996, the average debt load for post-secondary graduates in Canada rose to between $6,273 (community college graduates) and $10,341 (university graduates), and in 1996, nearly 2,600 students declared bankruptcy within 12 months of graduation.[97] Universities in the Atlantic provinces have some of the highest tuition costs in Canada, and the cost of advanced education is one of the biggest worries of youth in the region. Many youth fear they will not be able to afford post-secondary education, or that they will graduate overburdened with debt.

"ALL I CAN SEE EVERY TIME MY DEBT GROWS AS I GO ON TO ANOTHER YEAR OF UNIVERSITY, I THINK OF WHEN I FINISH SCHOOL AND AM STARTING MY CAREER, YOU KNOW, HOW MUCH I AM GOING TO HAVE TO CARRY AROUND AND HOW I AM GOING TO BE ABLE TO BALANCE IT ALL - ALL THE MONEY, YOU KNOW, TRYING TO LIVE YOUR LIFE AND ALSO PAYING OFF THIS HUGE DEBT."

"IF... UNIVERSITY IS BECOMING MORE OF A NECESSITY, WE ARE ALWAYS GOING TO BE IN THAT PREDICAMENT OF HOW MANY YEARS OUT OF UNIVERSITY ARE GOING TO BE ENTIRELY DEVOTED TO PAYING BACK OUR LOANS AND THAT IS KIND OF DISCOURAGING."

"MY GIRLFRIEND AT DAL THIS YEAR - FIRST YEAR - SHE HAS A $7000 STUDENT LOAN. SO FOR FOUR YEARS, YOU KNOW THAT'S WHAT SHE'S GOING TO BE HAVING."

High School is Not Enough

Post-secondary education is the key to the future. Given the need for advanced education and training to get ahead in the knowledge economy, finishing high school may be the single most important challenge for youth over the next 10 to 20 years. Most analysts agree that high school completion alone is no longer enough preparation for full employment in the future. It is, however, the minimum level of education required to avoid a marginal life. Those who do not graduate from high school have a strong likelihood of being poor, chronically unemployed and reliant on social assistance. Those who do graduate have a stronger chance of going on to advanced schooling/training.[98]

"MY FATHER OWNS A GAS STATION AND HE TRIED TO HIRE A GUY THAT ONLY HAD HIS GRADE 11; HE LITERALLY COULDN'T PUMP GAS AND WRITE OUT THE FORMS AND BALANCE THE CASH...WITH A GRADE 11 EDUCATION HE COULDN'T PUMP GAS...YOU KNOW, IT'S BLEAK."

Drop-out rates do not tell the whole story, however. One-quarter of high school students who were high school drop outs in 1991 had earned their diplomas by 1995, and most youth school leavers had plans to further their education.[99]

Chances of becoming employed increase for students who participate in co-operative education, which combines study with work experience at secondary and post-secondary levels. Over the past 20 years, co-op programs have increased four-fold in Canada. Students in co-op programs learn work skills as well as gain experience that positions them for employment after graduation. In the Atlantic provinces in 1996, 84% of graduates from post-secondary co-op programs found jobs after graduation. In the current youth employment market and for the foreseeable future, participation in co-op programs gives students a "leg up."[100]

Youth Illiteracy Still Exists

The ability to read and write is the most fundamental skill one learns in school, a key to developing self-esteem and individual capacity, and a pre-requisite for full participation in society. It is also a good indicator of access to opportunities. In the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), 10% of Canadian youth showed poor literacy skills. Literacy is associated with socioeconomic background: children who come to school hungry have an uphill battle when it comes to learning. Nevertheless, literacy differences between children from low-income families and their middle- to upper-income peers were negligible in several provinces according to the IALS. In the Atlantic provinces, however, youth from economically disadvantaged families were less literate than youth from higher socioeconomic status groups. This suggests that the education system is an equalizer. To close the literacy gap between have and have-not youth, the Atlantic provinces may need to look elsewhere in Canada to find other ways of improving resources and teaching for literacy in the future.[101]

Moving Beyond the 3 Rs

The disruption in the lives of youth and children caused by economic and social transitions is often most evident in school, where teachers must deal every day with students who are hungry, violent or have serious behavioural problems. Educators report growing difficulties with children and youth with poor self-esteem and emotional control. One of the most positive changes occurring in Canadian schools is the move toward addressing, through the curriculum, the emotional development of children. Using concepts involving emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, peer mediation, and non-violence, schools in the Atlantic provinces and elsewhere have been taking steps over the past several years to deal constructively with these issues previously outside their mandate.

It is unreasonable to expect that schools will solely be able to undo the harm associated with family dysfunction. Nevertheless, the emotional development of all children and youth today and in the future can only benefit from efforts made by schools to foster self-esteem, peacefulness and altruism. Results from a recent international survey seem to bear this out: the vast majority of Canadian young people (aged 11 to 24) felt it was important to be courteous and to help others less fortunate than themselves.[102]

Over the next 10 to 20 years, schooling will become even more important in the lives of youth as the need for higher education grows because of the new knowledge economy. The need for skill with computers and computer technology is growing. By emphasizing computer literacy, education systems in the Atlantic region are preparing our children and youth for the future. Nevertheless, basic literacy, numeracy and critical thinking continue to be the most important skills employers are seeking.

Youth who have university degrees, particularly if combined with co-operative work experience, will be well positioned for jobs; however, if the youth job market does not expand in the Atlantic provinces, many young people are likely to continue studying in post-secondary institutions or go elsewhere seeking opportunities. The gap between youth who have university degrees and those who do not will continue to grow, and young people who do not complete high school will face a bleak future.

Ensuring opportunities for all youth (especially those with low educational attainment) to become full, contributing participants in the job market and society requires programs to keep students in school, coupled with a strong system of career counselling and co-operative work experience. As pressures mount to reduce education costs in the face of falling enrollments over the next 10 to 20 years, addressing these needs will pose significant challenges.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The environments that surround us are not simply the background against which we live our lives. Natural and built environments have important influences on our survival and well-being. Air, water, soil, plants, and human interactions with natural resources are aspects of the ecosystem that determine health in important ways. Similarly, buildings, roads, energy systems, transportation, industry and their by-products all impact on the health and well-being of young and old.

Poor Housing is a Problem for Many Youth

One of the most basic survival needs is shelter. The quality of housing can affect the health and development of children and youth. Substandard housing is often subject to indoor air quality problems, pest infestations, contamination by lead, asbestos and pesticides, inadequate temperature control, and safety hazards that are most detrimental to the health of young people. Usually, substandard housing is located close to heavily travelled streets and roads, making personal safety and ambient air quality major concerns for those living in these areas.

Low-income families are more than twice as likely to live in substandard housing in unsafe neighbourhoods and spend larger percentages of their income on housing than more affluent families.[103] [104] Over the past decade, federal and provincial governments have stopped funding new social housing, leaving growing numbers of low-income families with children to settle for inadequate or unaffordable housing in the private marketplace or to become homeless. These trends are not likely to improve in the foreseeable future. As the number of poor families

with children grows, while the supply of social housing remains unchanged, the prospects for poor youth to have adequate shelter are dwindling.

Air Pollution is Hazardous to Health

Air pollution — indoors and out — is a widespread concern for many Canadians. The health effects of air pollution, ranging from irritation to sickness and death, are well documented. Children and youth whose bodies are still growing are more sensitive to the effects of air pollution than are non-elderly adults. They breathe in more pollutants, and their lungs are more susceptible to damage that cannot be repaired.

Childhood asthma is a major disease among children in Canada that has doubled over the last 15 years and continues to become more prevalent. Asthma is also one of the main causes of school absenteeism and the most common chronic illness among children.[105] The Atlantic region has the highest incidence of asthma in Canada.

Although scientists do not yet fully understand the causes of asthma, strong evidence links asthma to indoor and outdoor air pollution. Sources of indoor pollution include chemicals such as gases from heating and cooking or from building materials, pesticides and other household products, as well as from biological contaminants like molds, dust mites, pet dander and bacteria. Second-hand tobacco smoke is particularly detrimental to children's respiratory health and is a significant cause of asthma attacks.

In recent years, air quality in Canadian schools has become a major focus. Children and youth spend many of their waking hours in school. In the Atlantic region, there have been numerous, highly publicized instances of children and teachers becoming ill due to contaminants in school buildings. Scientists and school boards are now paying closer attention to air quality in school buildings and developing strategies for making improvements, such as "no-scents" policies, using environmentally friendly products and materials, increased maintenance of heating and air conditioning systems, removing mold and retrofitting older buildings. Nevertheless, the potentially high cost of engineering remedies called for by the problems in many older school buildings makes it unlikely that these problems will be eliminated easily. It is more likely that over the next 10 to 20 years, more emphasis will be placed on developing guidelines and practical strategies to improve air quality in schools.

Ambient air quality is another source of hazards to children and youth with chronic respiratory ailments. Ground level ozone and airborne particles are two common pollutants that have been associated with asthma. Although other pollutants that can also affect health (carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide) have been on a downward trend in recent years in Canada, levels of ozone and airborne particles have been increasing.[106] The amount of pollutants released into the atmosphere by industries in Canada grew by 12.3% between 1997 and 1998, raising concern among environmentalists that industries and governments are losing the will to reduce pollution.[107]

Poor Youth are More Likely to Get Sick

In general, in terms of exposure to environmental risks, poor children and youth are most likely to suffer the adverse effects of unhealthy environments. Children and youth in low-income families live in conditions that increase their risk: in substandard housing with hazards including asbestos, lead and mold; with exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke; and in neighbourhoods located near either heavy traffic and industry or waste disposal sites. Declines in the supply of social housing raise the probability that more children and youth will be exposed to environmental risk conditions as time goes on.

Loss of Natural Resources Affects Youth

The depletion of natural resources in the Atlantic region, particularly the loss of the cod fishery in Newfoundland, has had profound effects on the lives of youth. Not only has the cod moratorium resulted in loss of livelihood for their parents and communities, with all the stress and disruption entailed, but many have also lost their own future livelihoods and the social support networks that previously intact communities provided. Social divisions created by the uneven distribution of government compensation through the Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) have resulted in resentment and discrimination directed at some youth whose families have received compensation.[108]

Young People Care About the Environment

Children and youth have the advantage of being more knowledgeable about the environment than earlier generations thanks to the widespread inclusion of environmental education in school curricula. They know that industrial pollution, indoor air pollution and depletion of natural resources are environmental phenomena with significant impacts on their health and well-being and that these phenomena are not "natural" occurrences but the result of human activities and interventions. They have grown up recycling and understand the importance of waste reduction. This awareness and knowledge translate into action. Many grassroots environmental organizations, emerging environmental businesses, and consumer lobbying efforts are led by older youth. Over the coming decades, the challenge for young people will be to continue working to improve the environment as their numbers shrink and to maintain their ideals as they begin to make the transition from being activists to being decision-makers.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The main developmental tasks for adolescents are the formation of a positive self-identity, transition to greater personal independence and interdependence with peers and adults, preparation for work and further education, and preparation to become competent parents.[109] Youths' physical and emotional health are influenced by these tasks and, in turn, health status influence the outcomes of development. Youth have less need for primary health care services than most other age groups since acute and chronic illness are relatively uncommon in most young people. Nevertheless, there are critical youth health issues that require focused programs and services for youth. In

this section, some of the key issues for youth in terms of mental and physical health are examined in light of the demographic, social and economic trends discussed earlier.

Self-Esteem is the Key to Mental Health in Youth

The majority of Canadian youth aged 12 to 18 seem to be well adjusted and feel good about their relations with family, peers and teachers. Nevertheless, a significant number of young people experience adjustment difficulties related to emotional well-being. Anxiety, poor body image, loneliness, depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, alienation from peers and family, and mental illness are problems for many youth and may result in suicide. Underlying all of these is low self-esteem, a pervasive condition among youth.[110]

Self-esteem is a complex aspect of personal well-being resulting from subtle interactions among the health determinants. Low socioeconomic status is a key risk condition: children in poor families are more prone to low self-esteem and associated mental health difficulties than those who are well off. However, many youth from affluent families suffer from low self-esteem as well (and not all-low income youth do), suggesting that in addition to social and economic factors, other influences come into play.

Earlier in this report, we saw that certain protective factors interact with broad determinants to enable children to develop personal resources for coping with life's difficulties and making healthy choices. These factors include healthy child development, a sense of belonging, resilience and richness of opportunity. Two of the most important influences on children's lives are family income and parenting styles. Although these concepts are at an early stage of research in Canada, family seems to be the key to all of these. Children raised by loving but firm parents, in relative stability, whose basic needs are met and who are valued for themselves stand a good chance of growing into healthy, capable, well-balanced youth and adults. They develop the skills necessary to handle setbacks and make positive choices affecting health practices and well-being. Children who are at risk do not have positive family settings and live with conflict, abuse, neglect and/or parental incompetence or indifference.

Suicide is the second leading cause of injury-related deaths among youth aged 15 to 24, after motor vehicle accidents. Over the past 30 years, suicide among young men has increased dramatically. For youth aged 15 to 19, the suicide rate has doubled since 1970, from 7 per 100,000 to 14 per 100,000. Suicide rates are higher among 20 to 24-year-old men, but have decreased somewhat over the past decade. On the other hand, in the 1990s, the number of suicides among 10 to 14-year-olds jumped from 27 to 39 per year. Young women are much less likely to commit suicide, but are more often hospitalized for suicide attempts.[111] [112]

Aboriginal youth attempt suicide five times as often as non-native youth. In the Atlantic region, Newfoundland (with the exception of Labrador, where suicides among youth at Davis Inlet have been a serious concern) and Prince Edward Island have overall suicide rates well below the Canadian rate of 13.2 per 100,000.[113]

The conditions that lead to suicide are fairly well known. Suicide is often preceded by depression, loneliness and/or substance abuse. Youth who are lonely and depressed are likely to feel helpless, irritable and dissatisfied with their body image. Confusion about sexual orientation contributes to youth suicide risk. More often than not, youth who commit suicide are isolated from family and peers. Depression is more common among youth than among adults, among more girls than boys, and more among low-income groups than among those who are well off.[114] Drug and alcohol abuse is increasing among youth. Marijuana and hashish are being used by one in five youth in Grade 8, and by more than two-fifths of Grade 10 students. Excessive alcohol consumption (i.e., drunkenness) is showing up among 12-year-olds and is commonplace among youth by Grade 10.[115]

In the Atlantic provinces, in addition to these trends, use of other drugs by youth in Grades 7 to 12 is on the rise, notably hallucinogens (LSD, PCP), stimulants and inhalants. Even more alarming, a small percentage of youth at the junior high and high school levels are using cocaine and heroin. More youth in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are using drugs than in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island; however, alcohol use is higher among Newfoundland youth.[116]

Preventing youth suicide, and depression and substance abuse which can lead to suicide, will continue to be an important priority for youth health care. Many of the risk conditions that underlie these problems — poverty, unemployment and economic uncertainty, coupled with rapid social change, resource-deprived institutions and communities, family breakdown and dysfunction — are trends that are likely to influence the lives of children and youth in the Atlantic region for the foreseeable future, putting youth at risk for mental health problems in coming decades.

Healthy Lifestyle is the Key to Physical Health in Youth

Canadian youth are generally healthy. Acute and chronic illnesses are not major issues for most young people, who have outgrown childhood illnesses and are not yet subject to the physical effects of aging. Their major health issues are behaviours and lifestyles that decrease well-being in the short term and, more importantly, reduce opportunities for long, healthy lives. Issues of sexual and reproductive health, tobacco use and levels of physical activity figure prominently among youth health concerns.

Teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and the sexual abuse of youth are all critical youth health problems. In the Atlantic provinces, where unprotected sexual activity among youth is widespread, teenage pregnancies continue to occur at high levels, although there has been a decline in births to adolescents over the past 15 years. Incidences of chlamydia and gonorrhea have been increasing steadily in the region in recent years, and HIV infection is on the rise among young gay men.

Unlike sexually transmitted infections and adolescent pregnancies, sexual abuse of youth is not a function of risk behaviour, but rather of criminal victimization. Instances of sexual violence are more common in the Atlantic region (especially in Newfoundland), than in the rest of Canada, and children and youth are the most frequent victims.

Although no regional figures are documented, dating violence involving sexual abuse of young women is a growing problem across Canada.[117] [118]

Tobacco use among Canadian youth is on the increase, especially among young women. Nearly 1 in 3 women aged 15 to 19 and more than 1 in 4 young men smoke. Even more disturbing is that nearly 1 in 10 youth between the ages of 12 and 14 have started to smoke. In the Atlantic provinces, tobacco use among youth is higher than the Canadian average and has increased significantly in recent years.[119] [120]

Unfortunately, educational programs aimed at curbing tobacco use and unprotected sex among youth and legislation to restrict youths' access to cigarettes have not had much success. We are coming to understand that interventions targeted at individual risk behaviours of youth are not very effective. This area of prevention/promotion requires more attention and research. Marginalized youth, in particular, often reject whatever is valued by school, parents and society in favour of risky activities that make a statement about their "independence." Effective health promotion aimed at youth must be accessible (e.g., teen health centres located in or near high schools and other centres of youth activity), and have youth involved in design and delivery; youth-focused health promotion programs should be staffed by approachable professionals and/or trained peers, and services for youth (e.g., contraception, clinical testing) must be cheap or free.

Addressing the underlying causes of youth tobacco use and unsafe sexual activity requires integrated approaches that recognize the role of family, school, peer group and community. Collaborative action is called for among governments and citizen stakeholders to improve social and economic conditions that foster supportive families, pro-active institutions and youth-friendly communities. Yet, we must find the political will to deal with youth health concerns as the proportion of youth in the population shrinks and concerns of the growing seniors population dominate the agenda. The challenges in dealing with youth health issues are likely to grow in the next 10 to 20 years given current trends.

Being physically active is one of the best ways to protect and maintain health at any age. Regular physical exercise influences all aspects of well-being, including cardiovascular fitness, levels of body fat, blood pressure, sleeping patterns, and self-esteem. Establishing an active lifestyle in adolescence not only benefits the health of youth but also paves the way for lifelong physical fitness and well-being.

However, technology may be displacing physical exercise as the principal leisure time activity of Canadian youth. On the whole, our youth are less physically active today than they were a decade ago. This decline in physical activity coincides with a sizable increase in the amount of time youth, especially boys, spend using computer games. Nevertheless, Canadian youth are more physically active than youth from most other developed countries.[121]

FOUNDATIONS FOR A YOUTH-FRIENDLY FUTURE

CHALLENGES FACING ATLANTIC YOUTH IN THE NEXT 10 TO 20 YEARS

Atlantic Canadian youth in the new millennium face challenges very different from those of previous generations. The influences of the economy, population aging and social change are creating conditions that will shape a future for all age groups that bears little resemblance to the past. By virtue of their numbers, aging baby boomers will be a dominant force in the population for the next 40 years just as they have been at every other life stage for the past half century. Youth — from adolescence through young adulthood — will be a small minority in comparison and one that will decline even as the seniors population grows.

As a group, youth over the next 10 to 20 years will come of age in an era of uncertain economic growth and unparalleled social and technological changes. Some will be less well off than their parents and grandparents. As a group, they will have to work cooperatively with the much larger population of older adults to command political attention and influence control over economic resources. As the baby boom generation retires, shrinking numbers of youth will find jobs becoming plentiful. At the same time, they will bear increasing responsibility for economic productivity and the expanding social costs of supporting a large aging population. Also, the most influential institutions in the lives of youth — family and school — will be evolving in response to the powerful forces reshaping society. As familiar roles give way to new structures, norms and roles, these two key institutions of family and school will be less practiced in their traditional role of grounding youth. On the other hand, wide-scale social change will create new opportunities for these important social institutions to become more flexible and adaptable as time goes on.

The tasks and needs of youth are not changing, however. Young people in the future will move from childhood into adulthood seeking independence, a positive image of who they are, and ways to relate to peers and adults, as well as to prepare to enter the world of work. They will continue to need a solid foundation of self-esteem, self-confidence and personal health practices developed through healthy emotional and physical development at all stages of childhood. To acquire coping skills to deal with the challenges and inevitable setbacks of becoming adults, they will need to develop resilience and have strong, positive relationships with family, schools and peers. To reach their full potential, youth in the future, like youth today, will need to be fully included in society. The social inclusion of youth will continue to depend on abundance of opportunity, including positive parenting and functioning families, quality education, adequate shelter, safe neighbourhoods, healthy recreation and good jobs.

Over the coming decades, the personal resources of even the healthiest youth will be put to the test. Today, more young people manage to complete the tasks of youth and become productive adult members of society. Most are healthy and well-adjusted and have the personal resources to meet the challenges they face in their transition to adulthood: acquiring an education, forming close, healthy relationships and gaining work experience that paves the way for future employment.

Over the next 20 years, without major policy interventions, the soaring cost of post-secondary education will discourage many youth from going to university or college. Those who do obtain degrees will graduate with heavy debt loads. The lack of good jobs and low wages in the Atlantic provinces will put pressure on the best educated and most skilled youth to leave the region until about 2010. By that time, wide-scale retirement of baby boomers is likely to open up the job market and force local employers to pay more to fill positions with capable people.

Youth entering the job market over the next 20 years will be computer literate thanks to the widespread use of computers in schools. However, youth who have access to computers at home are likely to have a competitive edge over disadvantaged youth in any situation that calls for computer skills, while youth who have not finished high school will be at a great disadvantage despite any computer literacy. Also, youth who turn to computers rather than forming close personal relationships run the risk of remaining on the margins.

The challenges for disadvantaged youth posed by social, economic and demographic megatrends are enormous. Although in the minority, a significant number of young people do not make the transition to adulthood successfully. They struggle to finish high school and end up dropping out; they are unable to find jobs and end up on social assistance; and the relationships they have with families and friends often do not provide the support they need. The common denominator for these youth is poverty, and the growth of poverty among children and youth in the Atlantic provinces shows no signs of slowing down.

The continued loss of unskilled jobs, along with high unemployment and the growth of the knowledge economy in the region, will work against the poor. Unless the current growth trend in poverty changes, increasing numbers of youth will be consigned to lives that may involve dropping out of school, illiteracy, unemployment, becoming adolescent parents, living on the streets, collecting social assistance, abusing drugs and alcohol, engaging in criminal activities, becoming depressed, and committing suicide. Unfortunately, Aboriginal groups, because they have rapidly expanding youth populations and high levels of poverty, are likely to be hardest hit by these impacts on youth.

RESOURCES FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE

Families are Still the Critical Building Blocks

Consensus is strong that the most important influences on children and youth development are families, schools and communities. Young people who do not have positive, supportive family relationships, who feel they do not belong at school and/or lack opportunities in their communities are most often the ones whose transition into adulthood is a downward spiral of alienation, marginalization and hopelessness. With positive, effective parenting, quality education and adequate family incomes, young people have the best chance of growing up healthy.

For families in the future to play the supportive, protective role that children and youth need, the pressures and strains on families have to be relieved. Parents will need information and support for effective parenting, enabling

them to build social skills, values and resilience in their children, to keep the lines of communication open and to maintain discipline that is consistent and rooted in respect. At a time when families are changing rapidly, it will be even more important for single parents and parents in blended families to have support in roles that may be new and unfamiliar.

"THERE WERE A LOT OF STUDENTS AT MY HIGH SCHOOL FROM PUBLIC HOUSING, AND THERE WERE A LOT OF STUDENTS FROM MORE WEALTHY NEIGHBOURHOODS, AND THEN THERE WERE PEOPLE LIKE ME, JUST REGULAR, YOU KNOW, RUN-OF-THE-MILL — LOWER TO MIDDLE CLASS PROBABLY — AND I WOULD HAVE TO SAY THAT... IT WAS FAMILIES, REGARDLESS OF THE AMOUNT OF MONEY THEY WERE BRINGING HOME."

Most parents of adolescents want to know how best to cope with common issues: peer group influences, sexuality, drug awareness, dating, and schoolwork, and some have more difficult issues to deal with, including criminal activity, substance abuse, running away and pregnancy, among others. All parents require supportive and youth-friendly communities where resources are available locally — for instance, parenting programs, support groups, "hot-lines," and tools, tips and strategies presented in print and video formats, media presentations and public service announcements — that are easily accessible and encouraging. Such parenting resources are key ingredients of caring communities that value youth.

"MY FRIENDS WHO HAD A REALLY GOOD FAMILY, SOMEBODY WHO CARED HOW THEIR DAY AT SCHOOL WAS AND KNOW THAT THEY HAD AN EXAM NEXT WEEK ARE THE ONES THAT WERE DOING WELL AND SEEMED TO HAVE IT TOGETHER."

Parents must be able to provide for their children's material needs. To do so, they have to be fully employed. Anything less than full employment with job security leads to undue strain on families and their disruption. For single parents in particular, a permanent job with benefits means the difference between getting groceries at the supermarket or the local food bank. In addition, family-friendly employment policies (e.g., flex time, parental leave and on-site day care) minimize the strain on working parents. Trying to juggle livelihoods, personal needs and family responsibilities with limited means can fuel family dysfunction, but employment policies that are sensitive to family needs can reduce its social costs.

"IF YOU SEE YOUR PARENTS STRUGGLING AND TRYING TO BRING YOU UP WELL AND TRYING TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE AND STUFF, THEN YOU'LL GROW UP TO BE THE SAME WAY, LIKE TO PUT AN EFFORT INTO EVERYTHING YOU DO; AND IF, LIKE, YOU JUST SEE YOUR PARENTS NOT CARING OR ANYTHING, THEN YOU WON'T KNOW THE VALUE OF HARD WORK OR ANYTHING."

Above all, families require policies that ensure their economic security and inclusion in all the benefits of society. Erosion of family incomes, cutbacks in social transfers and benefits to families with children, as well as policies that have increased the gap between the rich and the poor made the past decade a dismal one for families.

Reversing the fortunes of youth in disadvantaged families requires child- and youth-focused social policies and increased involvement by governments in addressing the social and economic challenges that keep children in poverty. In Britain, for instance, the current Labour government is establishing a new social and economic order designed to promote social inclusion to benefit families and children. This so-called "Third Way" is a pro-enterprise, anti-exclusion approach that "reasserts the role that governments play... to widen the circle of winners, mitigate costs and insecurities and prepare people for change."[122]

Recent political dialogue in Canada about funding a National Children's Agenda, efforts to develop consensus between Ottawa and the provinces, and discussions about spending accumulated budget surpluses indicate a certain political will to move in the direction of addressing the needs of families and children. Among spending priorities that have been identified recently are child care, a national housing strategy and expansion of parental and maternity benefits. These are the kinds of supports to families that improve prospects for children and youth and ultimately strengthen the foundations of Canadian society.

Investment in Education is the Key to Prosperity

A high school diploma is just about the most important foundation any young person can have, and its value as time goes on cannot be underestimated. Given the critical importance of completing high school, schools must develop effective programs to keep students from dropping out, and make available whatever resources are necessary to keep students in school.

To improve their ability to be supportive settings for youth, schools will need to ensure that teachers have the resources and assistance available to deal with the needs of all students. Counselling, special education and occupational therapy are a few of the services required to meet students' special needs and relieve pressure on teachers trying to fill all these roles to the detriment of the learning environment.

Schools also have to ensure the safety of all students by developing strategies to eliminate bullying and violence and to promote positive, non-violent social skills. In addition, if they are to support youth in developing personal health practices, schools must make sure that curricula are relevant to their needs and keep pace with changing social norms. Many youth complain about school health programs having little relevance to their lives, particularly with respect to sexuality education. Curricula are often outdated and/or taught by unwilling or unskilled teachers. Developing partnerships with community-based, youth-oriented health organizations and using them to train and instruct is one way to address this problem.

Another complaint is that guidance services do not meet the needs of youth in an increasingly challenging job market. Career counselling soon may become one of the most critical services available to youth in high school and university; it must be responsive to and driven by the needs of youth, especially those with low educational attainment.

Since a university degree is fast becoming the benchmark for future employment, access to post-secondary education will be an essential resource for young people. The growing trend of education only for those who can afford it must change, or we run the risk of denying all but a privileged few entry through this gateway to the future.

Most of the steps that need to be taken by schools to better support and protect youth require increased spending. For example, ensuring a bright future for youth will require investment in education. Canada must recognize what many other countries already know: investment in public education is one of the surest ways to build up the economy. Ireland, for example, is a country with one of the fastest growing economies in the developed world. Recently, the Irish government has pumped hundreds of millions of pounds into all levels of public education with the expressed intention of keeping highly educated young Irish people at home, contributing to Ireland's economy.[123]

Cutbacks in education in Canada and the Atlantic region have seriously eroded the effectiveness of schools at all levels to meet the changing needs of youth in the 21st century. By reversing this trend and increasing educational spending, not only will governments expand the future for youth, they also will build up the human capital that fuels their economies. With major investments in education at all levels, Canada will once again have the opportunity to be equal to and surpass other countries in economic growth and productivity.

Communities are Where Youth Belong

Communities in the Atlantic region have suffered the effects of economic downturns and budget cutbacks over the past decade. Many community resources have been lost or decreased in ways that threaten cohesion and community spirit and as a result, youth feel an increasing sense that they do not belong there. User fees for recreation services, increased public transit rates, public recreation facilities that are not maintained, loss of community organizations, and loss of recreation staff, programs and services diminish the community for all its members, but youth, who do not have the means to pay for recreation or services, suffer more than most.

Young people need places to go and things to do. They need their own spaces — places where they feel free from the scrutiny of adults. They need clubs, recreation centres, rinks, public parks, swimming pools, beaches, dance halls, and soccer fields. Young people also need services. They must have people they can trust when they cannot turn to parents, teachers or peers with their problems. Help lines, drop-in centres, free clinics, health centres, support groups, and shelters for youth — services of any kind that focus on youth and are driven by them — are critical resources in every community. In cities where street youth live, many of whom involved in the sex trade and drug scene, the need for community-based resources and outreach to youth is even greater.

In many large communities (cities and towns), facilities and services like these are disappearing or being severely cut back by cash-strapped municipalities. Meanwhile, in rural communities, such resources have always been a rarity, but now they are nearly nonexistent. Nevertheless, examples exist of successful, youth-driven community resources. In Saint John, for instance, the Teen Resource Centre of the local community health centre is led by youth. The Teen Advisory Council of the Centre develops programs and guides the activities of the Centre. The Council sponsors speakers on youth issues and organizes activities such as street art displays to raise AIDS awareness. Youth involved with the Centre volunteer their time to work in community institutions such as nursing homes, raise funds for special events, partner with other groups and lobby for youth issues. Looking into the future, if Atlantic Canadian communities are to support youth and give them a place to belong and remain, it will require spending money, not closing doors. Positive examples like the experiences of the Teen Resource Centre successfully challenge negative youth stereotypes and demonstrate the value of investing in places for youth.

The ability of our communities to support youth depends not only on making resources available, however. Encouraging youth participation by giving them a voice in civic decision-making is a way to make communities more youth-friendly, even in the face of economic uncertainty. Communities can make youth feel they belong by validating their experience and encouraging them to get involved in decision-making by giving them vehicles to do so. A number of municipalities across Canada have youth advisory councils and/or round table discussions for youth to offer insights and contribute to strengthening their communities by developing relevant projects and programming for youth. In the most recent survey of Canadian municipalities by the Canadian Council on Social Development, 16 out of 21 cities that responded indicated they encourage youth participation through such means.[124]

When youth are involved in decision-making, communities become more youth-friendly. In 1999, the Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat surveyed organizations across the province that deal with youth. Drop-in centres, youth health centres, clubs, libraries, and school advisory councils were among those who responded. Most were entirely or partly youth-driven. They had in common the goal of eliminating negative stereotypes and making their communities more welcoming to youth. In communities where these organizations existed, youth were commended for their positive qualities. In one town, a merchant who had long been opposed to opening a local youth centre ended up making a generous donation after the centre had been operating for one year. The young people involved in these organizations reported that the chance to have responsibility for planning and decision-making was unique and contributed to their personal development.[125]

Clearly, giving youth a place at the table that is more than just a token not only benefits young people but ultimately strengthens the entire community.

PLANNING AND PUBLIC POLICY TO SUPPORT YOUTH

To ensure that public policies are designed to improve the future for youth, the most important priority for planners and policy-makers is to listen to youth. Young people are experts on their capacities. They are creative, innovative and practical, and they want to be heard. They understand fiscal responsibility and fiscal restraint and are prepared to work on developing affordable solutions. They also have a keen sense of justice and feel disenfranchised. They did not have a hand in population aging, child poverty, resource scarcity or the decline of rural communities. Yet, they recognize that as tomorrow's adults, they will take responsibility in planning for the future.

"I THINK IF THE GOVERNMENT... PAID MORE ATTENTION TO WHAT THE STUDENTS AND YOUTH THINK, THERE WOULD BE A LOT BETTER EDUCATION SYSTEM. I THINK IF THEY ACTUALLY LISTENED TO WHAT, QUOTE, 'KIDS' — THAT'S WHAT THEY CALL US — ACTUALLY HAD TO SAY, ACTUALLY LISTENED TO HOW WE WOULD LIKE SCHOOL TO BE — LIKE NOT SO MANY PEOPLE IN CLASSES — THEN I THINK THEY'D HAVE A LOT MORE SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE COMING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL AND GOING TO UNIVERSITY... IF THEY ACTUALLY ASKED THE STUDENTS WHAT THEY WANTED, THEY'D PROBABLY HAVE A BETTER EDUCATION SYSTEM ALTOGETHER."

The solutions to issues that affect youth now and in the future must include consultation with, and involvement of, youth in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs.

APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

31 young men and women from across the Atlantic region who shared their views in focus groups.

NEWFOUNDLAND:

Wes Alward
Tracy Holmes
Lindsay Hawco
Michael Luke
Jennifer Manning
Bill Murray
Samantha Organ
Michael O'Rafferty
Ricky Schuler

NEW BRUNSWICK:

Allan Buck
Letitia Byrne
Christine Cole
Sabrina Dunphy
Mike Green
Rustie Hardy
Jeff King
Jill Lanteigne
Kate McNeil
Steven Miller
Kristen Roderick

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND:

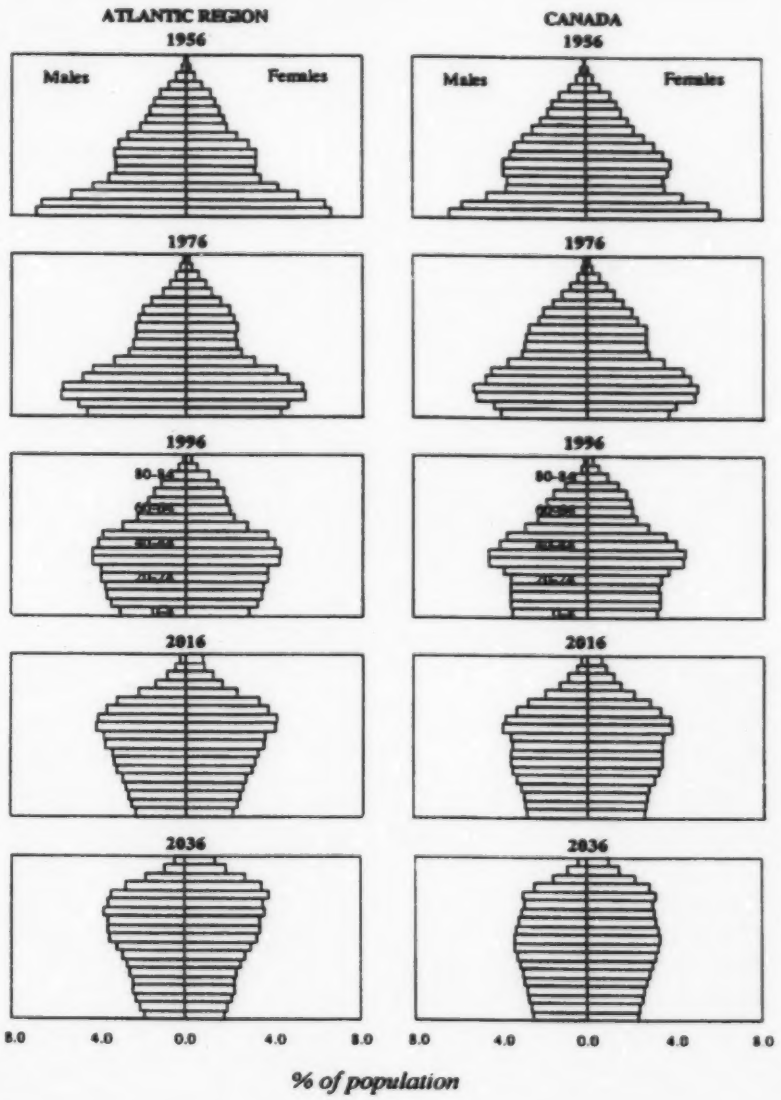
Amanda Arnold
Glenda Axworthy
Mark Holmes
Chris McBeath
Julie Rhynes
Kelly Wood

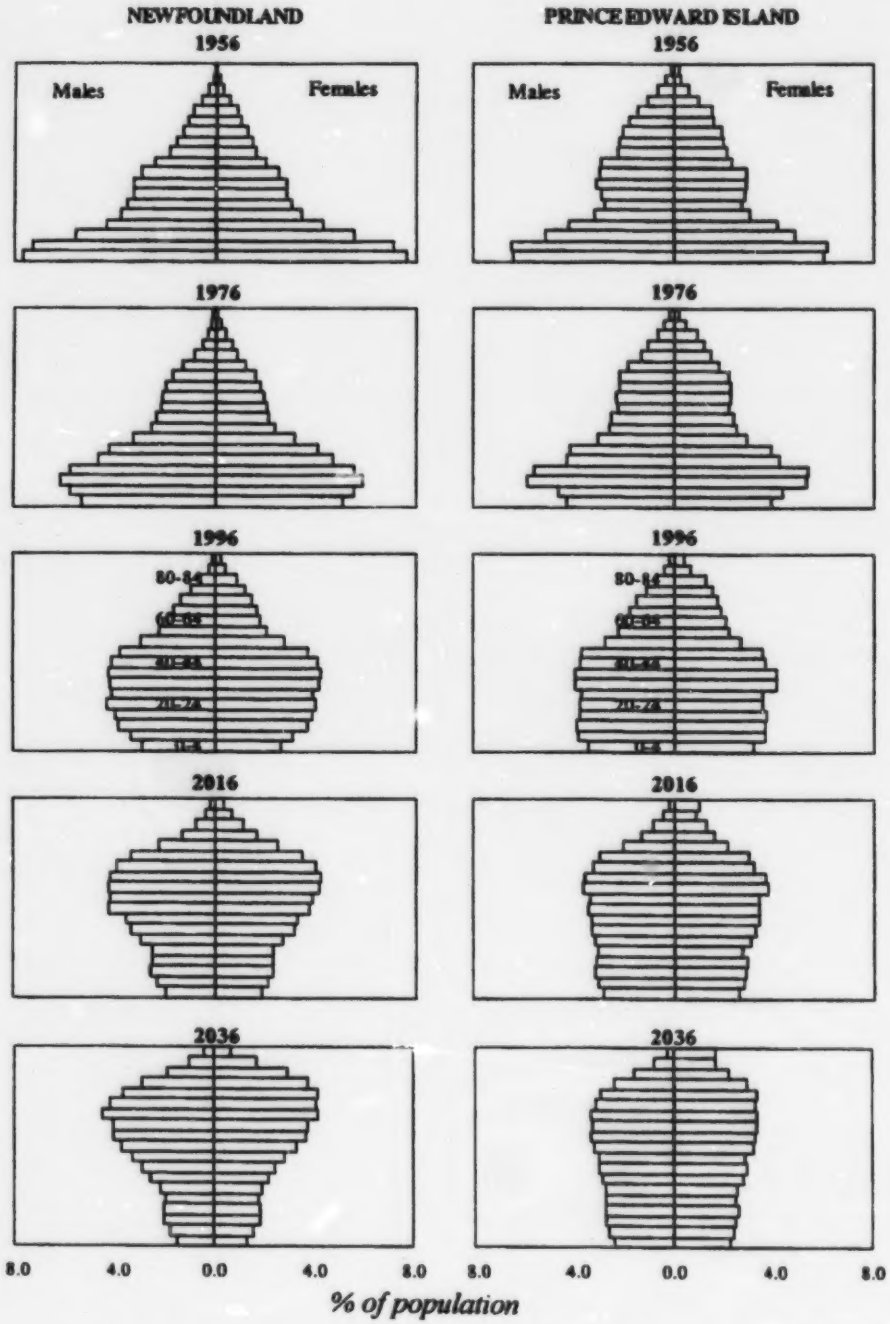
NOVA SCOTIA:

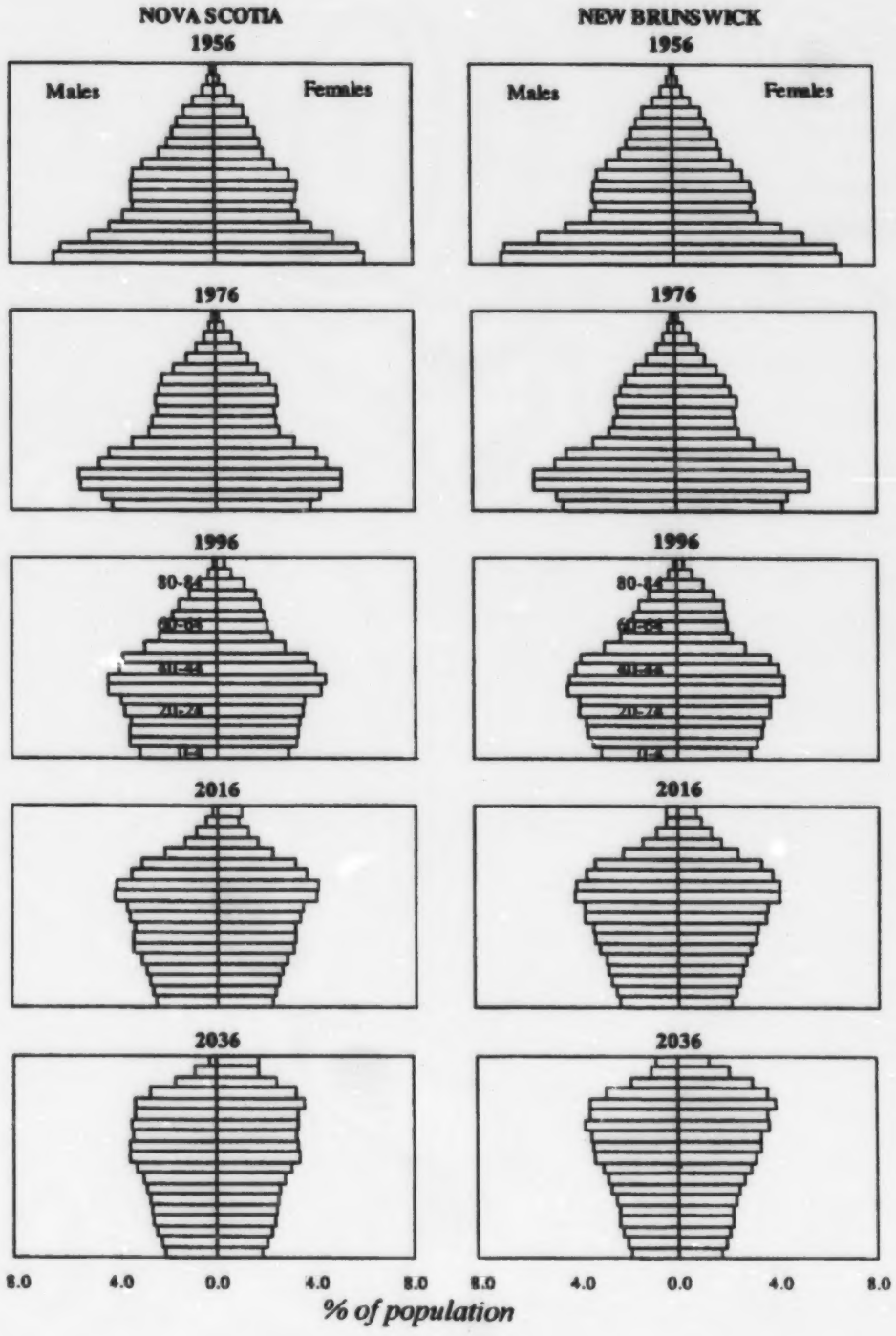
Nicole Bemster
Meegan Dowe
Jonathan English
Ryan MacNeil

APPENDIX 2: POPULATION PYRAMIDS

This figure presents population pyramids, showing the distribution of age groups in the population of Canada, in the Atlantic region, and in each of the four provinces separately. The youngest groups are at the bottom, oldest at the top. Each bar represents a five-year age group.The 1956 pyramids, wide at the base, depict the arrival of the baby boom generation. As this group becomes older, moving up the pyramid in later years, their significance relative to other age groups in the population is clearly evident in pyramids with bulging mid-sections. Meanwhile, the bottom of the pyramid is shrinking as the fertility rate drops and fewer children are born.




NEWFOUNDLAND
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
1956
Males
Females
1976
1996
2016
2036
8.0
4.0
0.0
4.0
8.0
% of population


NOVA SCOTIA
NEW BRUNSWICK
1956
Males
Females
1976
1996
80-84
2016
2036
8.0
4.0
0.0
4.0
8.0
% of population

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11. *Net migration* is the difference between the number of migrants out of, and the number arriving into, an area such as a province.
12. In this new economic paradigm, ideas and innovation are key forces in the economy. Of particular importance are knowledge producing industries such as computers and information processing equipment, software, advanced telecommunications, and services to diffuse these technologies. Similarly, sectors involved in transforming information (e.g., advertising, market research, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and management consulting) are creating a competitive advantage based on their ability to innovate and to market their ideas and innovations.
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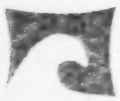

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